

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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Spiritual Asphyxia

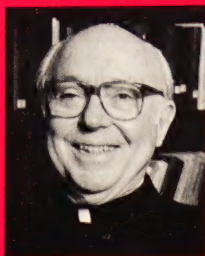
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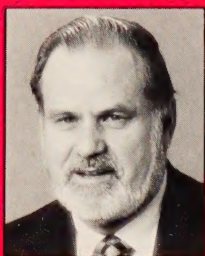
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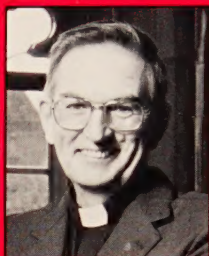
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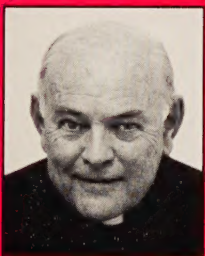
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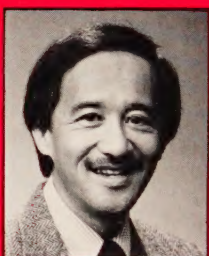
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Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and bibliography. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide author name(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

Book reviews, which should not exceed 600 words in length, should be sent to the Book Review Editor, Jon O'Brien, S.J., D.O., c/o HUMAN DEVELOPMENT (for address, see above).

Unaccepted manuscripts will not be returned unless requested and submitted with a stamped, self-addressed return envelope.

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EDITOR'S PAGE

THE NEW YEAR INVITES A FRESH START

We at the offices of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT are discovering that excitement brings along with it a rainbow of other emotions when the occasion for its arousal is a transition as profound as the one we are experiencing these days. Gratitude, hope, sadness, anxiety, and joy all play prominent roles in the drama of uprooting ourselves from our home in Boston and replanting our whole operation in a new and distant location. Since you, our readers, are so important to us and to our educational mission, we want you to know about the changes we are making and why we are making them at this time.

For several years, Saint Luke Institute (SLI) in Maryland has been expanding its educational and research efforts to match the development of its renowned therapeutic services to clergy and religious congregations. In view of this progress, SLI recently moved to a new, much larger, and more attractive site in Silver Spring, where an entire wing of the central building on the forty-acre campus is reserved for educational purposes. Appreciating how closely the aims of the Jesuit Educational Center for Human Development (JECHD) coincide with their own, the SLI administrators and governing board invited us to bring the Christian Institute for the Study of Human Sexuality, along with HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, to occupy this completely remodeled and comfortably furnished residence and to collaborate with them in presenting educational programs designed to enhance the physical, emotional, and spiritual health of clergy, religious, and laity. We gladly accepted their invitation. As of January 1, 1997, while continuing to operate the Christian Institute for the Study of Human Sexuality and the journal HUMAN DEVELOPMENT as independent entities, we will also begin a cooperative venture with SLI, which we mutually expect to be rich in creativity and potential for increased service to the church and to people all over the world.

The Christian Institute for the Study of Human Sexuality, just finishing its second year of existence, has already graduated nearly 150 students who have completed a month or more of study at its Boston location. Half of these students have come to us from the United States, and the others have come from various countries throughout the planet, including China, Sri Lanka, Scotland, Nigeria, and Tonga Island. Half of our students have been women, and several have been laypersons. At first we advertised our independent-study program as an experience structured to meet the needs of persons involved in seminary and religious-community formation work, but it soon became apparent that others involved in human-development ministries could draw equal benefit from studying with us.

Gradually, our numbers and space requirements have grown, and our new location will offer us an opportunity to expand even further. Already, the current pace of registrations indicates that in 1997 we will double our 1996 enrollment. Moreover, through cooperation with SLI, we will be able to improve our educational offerings by presenting them in a setting where the cultural, historical, and religious resources of our nation's capital, Washington, D.C., will literally be a few miles from our doorstep.

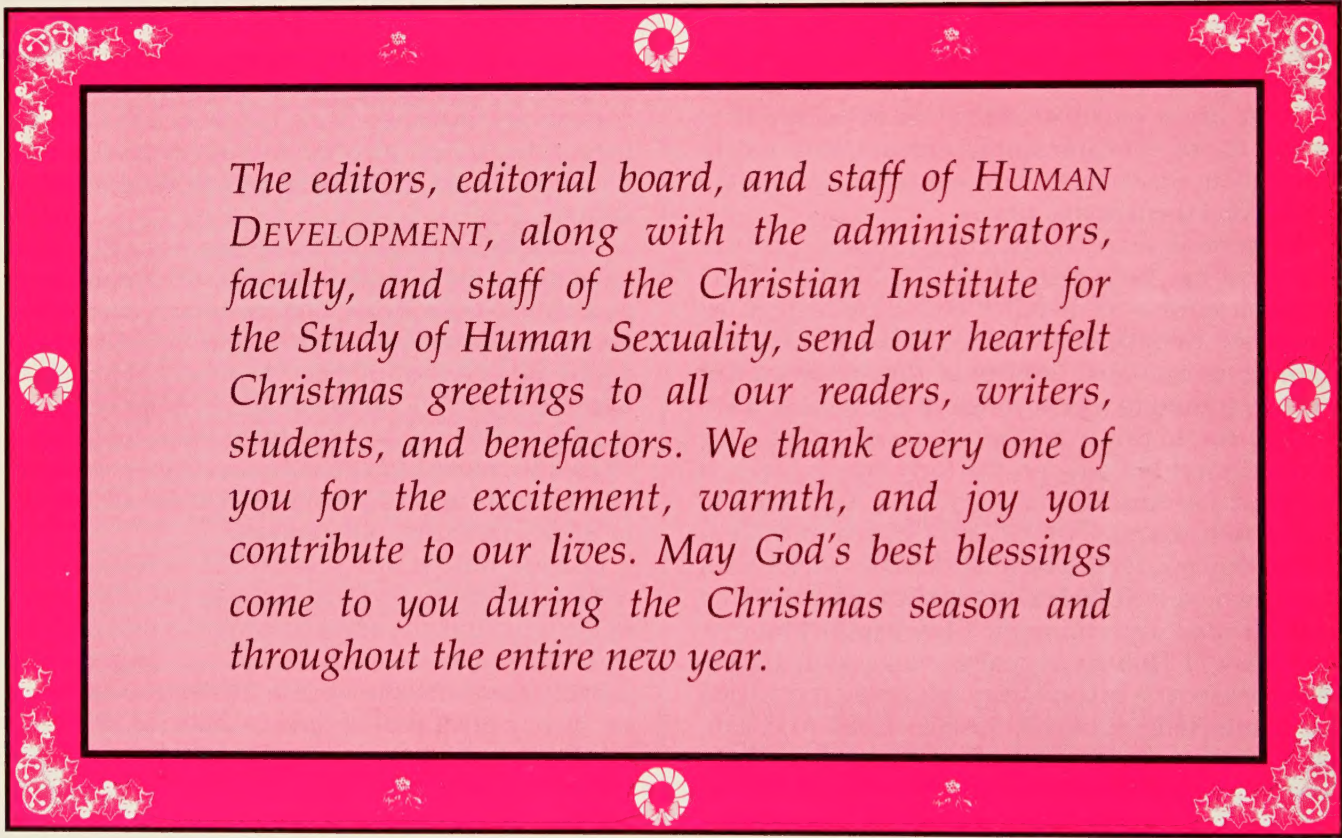
Leaving Boston and our friends, religious community, colleagues, and hosts at Saint John's Seminary saddens us; and, of course, moving to a different city and environment with a new faculty and staff inevitably involves some anxiety. But the change is one we spent a great deal of time considering and praying about, and some very clear subsequent signs convinced us that the move coincides with God's plans for us. The benefactors who made possible our Institute's start-up and success in Boston, all the students who traveled there to study with us, the professional faculty members who worked so hard to give shape to our program, and the good God who inspired and prospered our ministry—all these blessings in our lives have provided the basis for our confident expectation that the JECHD's future in Maryland will be challenging, exciting, and fruitful.

Many of you, our readers, have prayed for the success of our ministry. Some have written welcome words of encouragement and appreciation. A number have sent generous financial contributions to make our work possible. Many have introduced others to HUMAN DEVELOPMENT and the Christian Institute for the Study of Human Sexuality. To all of you we are profoundly grateful, and in our prayers we ask God to bless you abundantly. At this turning point in our history, we need your support more than ever. And we promise to keep you informed about our progress through the seasons ahead, because you, our readers, are among our most valued friends.

For now, all of us at the editorial offices of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT wish you a most joyful Christmas season and a new year overflowing with faith and hope and love.



James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.
Editor-in-Chief



The editors, editorial board, and staff of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, along with the administrators, faculty, and staff of the Christian Institute for the Study of Human Sexuality, send our heartfelt Christmas greetings to all our readers, writers, students, and benefactors. We thank every one of you for the excitement, warmth, and joy you contribute to our lives. May God's best blessings come to you during the Christmas season and throughout the entire new year.

Spiritual Asphyxiation

Reverend Stephen J. Rossetti, Ph.D., D.Min.

When the human body is asphyxiating, red blood cells do not deliver oxygen to the body, nor do they return carbon dioxide to be exhaled. Lips and nail beds turn purple; skin color assumes a pallor; sensory functioning becomes impaired. A marked apathy, sometimes even a profound stupor, often ensues. After a brief five minutes, permanent brain damage is likely, and blindness is possible. Death follows quickly.

So, too, it goes with the human spirit: in order for our spirits to grow, even to survive, they must constantly "breathe" spiritual air. When there is an insufficient amount of this kind of "air," our spiritual selves suffocate. When the air runs out altogether, our spirits die.

It is increasingly apparent to us at Saint Luke Institute, a treatment center for clergy and religious women and men, that many who come to us not only suffer from psychological and physical disorders; they also suffer from an alarming lack of spiritual "air." They might be said to be asphyxiating spiritually.

In fact, it is usually the case that the physical, psychological, and spiritual health of these religious and priests decline simultaneously. For example, it is not uncommon that a person who comes to us will not have undergone a physical examination for years, is overweight, and has poor muscle tone, elevated cholesterol, and perhaps poorly controlled blood pres-

sure or blood sugar. At the same time, he or she may suffer from depression or anxiety disorders and have marked problems with personal relationships. There may also be significant behavioral issues, such as substance abuse or acting-out behaviors. Finally, closer inspection reveals that their spiritual lives have all but collapsed. Their long-term recovery depends not only on the treatment of their medical and psychological conditions but also on the regeneration of their spirits. If they are to find healing and peace, they must begin to spiritually "breathe" again.

SPIRITUAL DISORDERS OFTEN HIDDEN

Unfortunately, the signs of impending spiritual death are not as obvious or as conspicuously urgent as the symptoms of physical death. There is no visible gasping for spiritual air, no soul turning blue, and no pallor indicative of spiritual apathy.

Many times, spiritual problems are hidden behind or disguised within a myriad of psychobiological symptoms. For example, it is no accident that one of the most effective aids for recovery from alcohol addiction is a program with a strong spiritual base: the twelve-step program of Alcoholics Anonymous. While alcoholism often has the biological component of being a physical disease, it can be accompanied by and

intertwined with a spiritual dying. Thus, recovery is intimately connected with spiritual rejuvenation.

Similarly, spiritual problems can be hidden behind an external religious conformity. It is not uncommon for religious and priests whose spiritual lives have all but atrophied to disguise this malady behind pious-sounding phrases and religious acts. They have learned what to say and how to act as “good” spiritual people, and they may try to keep up a pious exterior. Indeed, they may sometimes not only fool others but also deceive even themselves.

This self-deception makes their spiritual condition all the more difficult to heal. A treatment program will necessarily challenge such individuals to break through their shallow facade. However, these clients will likely perceive that challenge as a threat to their faith. They cling to pious-sounding phrases and actions and use them as defenses against the truth. A challenge to their spiritual facade will be mightily resisted.

This is not a new problem. Jesus quoted the prophet Isaiah when he said, “This people pays me lip service, but their heart is far from me” (Mark 7:6). Jesus pointed to what lies within the human person as the true source of impurity: “What emerges from within a person, that and nothing else is what makes him impure” (Matt. 7:20).

Of course, an external religiosity is usually a sign of a true inner authenticity. People’s holy actions usually mirror a budding holiness within. Indeed, it is praiseworthy to adopt external religious practices as an aid to inner purity and holiness. However, there are times when examination will reveal that outer religiosity and theological ideas can actually be used as defenses against the pain and struggle of living an authentic spiritual life. Pious phrases, ideas, and acts can be used as a defense against the “awe-ful” task of truly facing ourselves and the Living God.

UNDERDIAGNOSING SPIRITUAL DISORDERS

In this modern psychological and medical era, we readily recognize and treat psychological and physical disorders. However, the danger is that our society consistently overlooks the presence of spiritual problems in people’s lives and thus fails to apply the proper spiritual remedies.

In a modest step forward, the American Psychiatric Association, in its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fourth Edition*, has recognized the possibility and the significance of spiritual problems. The manual now includes the code V62.89, which stands for “Religious or Spiritual Problem”—an appropriate diagnostic label for “distressing experiences” around one’s spiritual or religious life, such as a “loss or questioning of faith” or a “questioning of spiritual values.”

It may be time to begin to recognize more clearly the reality of spiritual dysfunction, its sometimes hidden place within our lives, and the importance of spiritual treatment for a full recovery.

SPIRITUAL SYMPTOMS IDIOSYNCRATIC

Treatment of spiritual dysfunction must begin with proper diagnosis. To diagnose spiritual problems, we might first try to investigate the symptoms present, no matter how disguised they might be.

Of necessity, symptoms of spiritual asphyxia will be somewhat idiosyncratic. Signs that one person is spiritually dying might be very different from another person’s signs.

Again, the analogy of breathing might help. Military pilots are placed in an altitude chamber during their training. The air in the chamber can simulate an altitude of many thousands of feet. The trainees are placed in the chamber, the air is made to simulate a high altitude, and the trainees are told to take off their oxygen masks. Within a few moments they experience hypoxia, or a lack of oxygen. The trainees are then asked to note their symptoms.

Some experience euphoria; others have difficulty concentrating; still others find their vision dimming. The student pilots are told to remember their own symptoms. Hypoxia is a subtle and deadly killer. If ever they feel these symptoms in flight, they should quickly determine if they are getting enough oxygen before their impaired mental functioning makes them prone to a crash.

Similarly, we who serve the Lord must learn our own symptoms of a lack of spiritual oxygen. Many a spiritual crash of a religious or priest could have been avoided had early signs been heeded and appropriate steps taken. For some, early signs may include becoming angry or bitter; others may feel continually victimized or unappreciated; still others may become excessively absorbed in work, alcohol, or themselves.

Learning these self-symptoms is part of the beginning of an authentic spiritual journey. A commonplace medieval maxim asserts that the spiritual life begins with self-knowledge. An important part of that knowledge is learning our own weaknesses and recognizing signs that we are not doing well.

SYMPTOMS OF SPIRITUAL ASPHYXIATION

Despite the fact that symptoms of an impending spiritual crash are idiosyncratic, we share a common humanity; thus, there must be common symptoms of spiritual asphyxiation. I propose the following five symptoms as a beginning list.

Lack of enthusiasm. A clear sign that our spiritual lives are not going well is a lack of enthusiasm. When our spirits are alive and breathing well, we become enthusiastic. The word *enthusiasm* comes from the greek *en theos*, meaning “possessed by God” or “in God.” When our spirits are alive, they necessarily live in God and are energized by the Divine Spirit.

Naturally, some personality types are more ebullient than others; thus, there are a multitude of different ways and styles in which we express our enthusiasms. But spiritually alive people will almost always find something that interests them, something that excites them, something that gives them energy.

Depression and burnout are psychobiological states that rob a person of energy. They can be terrible afflictions brought about by a number of conditions, including chemical imbalances, physical illness, psychological trauma, and excessive stress, work, or conflict. While the presence of depression and burnout do not necessarily mean that the spirit is dying, they may be intertwined with spiritual asphyxiation. At any rate, persons with depression or burnout should seek immediate attention.

The real danger in failing to live *en theos* is not depression or burnout but spiritual apathy. When we are not living *en theos*, we may lack interest in anything. We may become people without passion. And when the “fire” of the Spirit goes out, we merely exist. We shuffle along, going through the motions, and our lives become empty. A spiritual stupor like the mental stupor of asphyxia can result when we do not breathe enough spiritual air.

A spiritual enthusiasm will express itself in different ways. Some become excited by the beauty of creation; others find human relationships challenging; still others become interested in ideas or knowledge. Whatever our enthusiasm, living in God allows us to find God in the world around us. When we see beauty or truth, we see God. And this, for the spiritual person, is energizing.

There is much enthusiasm in the church today. There are countless signs of life as people speak out passionately on a variety of issues. New ministries are springing up in all corners of the church. People continually witness to what God has done for them. We should be grateful for the presence of the Spirit among us, giving us God’s life as we live *en theos*.

Absence of creativity. Another common sign of impending spiritual death is a lack of creativity. When the last ounce of our creativity is gone, we stop having personal spiritual insights. We resort to superficial spiritual statements devoid of feeling or commitment.

All of us have ways in which we express our creativity. They can be as simple as placing the flowers

on the altar in a pleasing arrangement or thinking of new ways to accomplish our ministries. Creativity also expresses itself in our relationships with others and with God. Creative relationships change, grow, and deepen. When we have such relationships, we are spiritually alive and breathing well. When we stop being creative, it is a sure sign that something is amiss and we are beginning to die.

At Saint Luke Institute, we conduct a spiritual assessment interview with each of the men and women who come to us for assistance. As noted earlier, we find that in the vast majority of cases, significant psychological problems are accompanied by a spiritual life that has greatly deteriorated. Most people with serious psychological problems are asphyxiating spiritually. Such clients evidence an apparent emptiness in their spiritual lives. During the course of the interview, these clients often mouth spiritual platitudes, such as “God loves me” or “God is a loving Father.” Lacking throughout the session is a sense that they experience personal understanding and personal involvement in a dynamic relationship with God. Their words sound hollow and unconvincing. The creativity and enthusiasm is gone, and in its place is a spiritual superficiality.

Like the presence of enthusiasm, creativity is a sign of God’s presence. God is, par excellence, the Creator. When we are alive in the Spirit, God lives in us, and we too create. Then our relationship with God becomes dynamic and personally involving. We may get angry at God; we sometimes feel grateful for what God has done; at other times we tell God we are struggling and need help. Spiritual creativity is a great and unique manifestation of the life of God in human beings.

Many priests and religious in our church today, even after thirty, forty, and fifty years of active ministry, are wonderfully alive with creativity. They initiate new programs; they develop new spiritual insights; they demonstrate a youth and a vitality that are clear signs of God in them.

Also, in spiritual direction, there are many men and women who speak of their struggles in their relationships with God and others. Instead of an empty superficiality, their spiritual selves are alive with newness, struggle, and creativity.

Lack of peace. A third sign of impending spiritual asphyxiation is a lack of inner peace. Like the swimmer who has remained underwater too long and panics for lack of air, the person who is spiritually dying experiences an absence of inner harmony and peace. This is a fundamental conflict at the inner core of the person.

Whereas this internal conflict and “dis-ease” may be intertwined with psychological anxieties, spiritual

dying and psychological anxieties are not identical. Many people suffer from anxieties such as phobias, panic attacks, or generalized anxieties; these occur on the level of the human psyche and do not necessarily touch the most intimate core of the person. However, when a person is spiritually dying, there is a lack of harmony and peace at the very deepest level.

An excellent illustration of this spiritual dis-ease can be found in the scriptural account of the Gerasene demoniac. The man was possessed by legions of demons. He never rested. Day and night, he screamed and gashed himself with stones. He was so tortured that he could not even sleep. After Jesus healed the man, he became "human" again and was able to rest. The scriptures say he was then "fully clothed" and "seated." The man was able to sit and rest because God had entered his life.

If we live in harmony with the God who dwells within, we experience a marvelous sense of inner peace. When we deny our inner God-nature and are spiritually dying, we experience a raging inner conflict. Metaphorically, our spirits feel like screaming and can find no rest.

Inner peace is one of the greatest gifts bestowed upon us when we dedicate ourselves to God. At the Last Supper, this was Jesus' farewell gift to his apostles: "Peace is my farewell to you, my peace is my gift to you" (John 14:27). In Galatians, peace is named as one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (5:22).

But this peace is not an absence of stress or tension. We are all well aware of the normal conflicts and strains that are present in human life. Sometimes these stresses become almost unbearable. Yet for the spiritually alive person, an inner harmony and peace pervade the spirit and spill over into the psyche and body. Rather than a negation of conflict, this peace is the positive presence of the Holy Spirit.

If we should ever wonder what the rationale is for living in God and welcoming the Spirit, we might recall what the opposite was like for the Gerasene demoniac, wandering among the tombs.

Lack of humor. I remember well a sister who came to us for an assessment. She had done much good work and was attentive to the needs of others. However, she had many hidden, serious difficulties. Perhaps the most significant manifestation of these difficulties was her total lack of humor. She was a joyless woman who, in her own words, was simply waiting to die. She saw nothing left for herself. However, after several weeks of spiritual and psychological work, she began to smile and laugh again. I recall being touched by the spontaneity and warmth of her newly found smile. It made me think of the scriptural passage, "This [sister] of yours was dead and has come back to life" (Luke 15:32).

When a person can laugh, it witnesses to a sense of surprise and the presence of joy. It requires a certain humility and openness. On the other hand, I cannot imagine people in hell enjoying a good joke.

The presence of humor does not mean that we continually walk around with a smile or refuse to face the pain of life. Many who visit Saint Luke Institute are surprised by the pervading presence of humor among the staff and clients. It is not uncommon to hear a roomful of people burst out with laughter. At the same time, there is much emotional intensity and a regular sharing of hurt and pain. Tears are just as common in our sessions as laughter.

When humor and spontaneity become part of our lives, it means that the pain and the hurt are being healed. Also, it means that our inner suffering is becoming redemptive rather than death-dealing.

When people live without humor and laughter, there is often an inner anger, seated deep within the person, that swells gradually into an all-consuming rage. My own definition of "hell" is a state in which people are consumed by their own rage. Some people are living in hell right now.

One of the worst afflictions that beset priests and religious who come for treatment is that they, like the Gerasene demoniac, are increasingly controlled by an inner rage. A not uncommon observation about one of our clients is, "He is an angry man."

To feel angry from time to time is a natural and healthy reaction to injustice and hurt. But some people's lives become overwhelmed by an intense and deep-seated anger that colors their perceptions and drives their actions. An important sign of returning psychological and spiritual health is that the rage subsides and the rational person takes charge once more.

Of course, in each symptom of spiritual death, there is an interconnection between the spirit and the psyche. It is not an accident that historically, an insane person has been called "mad." The Gerasene demoniac, who screamed among the tombs, was cured of his demonic possession and was described as being "perfectly sane"—that is, he was no longer possessed, nor was he mad.

Humor and spontaneity are signs that we are not being overcome by our pain and suffering, nor are we being overcome by an inner rage. Rather, in the midst of conflict and stress, a life-giving Spirit dwells within us.

Lack of gratitude. The final symptom of spiritual asphyxiation is the face of a bitter person. Most of us begin ministry, and life in general, with a bit of naive optimism and youthful hope. As the days pass, disappointments and discouragements eat away at our spirits until, for some, nothing is left. Their hearts become empty; their joy is gone; their spirits are dead-

ened. Their youthful naiveté is replaced by an aged bitterness, which is often justified as a “realistic” attitude.

Indeed, part of any healthy maturation includes letting go of our youthful perspectives and unreal optimisms. But if our spirits have not been continually nourished, if they are not breathing, then the dissipation of our youthful dreams will leave nothing but bitterness. In this case, we have not done the hard work of reforming and refashioning ourselves into seasoned spiritual people.

On the other hand, a beautiful and encouraging sign of a spiritually alive person is gratitude. Spirit-filled people are grateful people. Being grateful has little to do with what happens to us in life or how many material possessions we have. Most of us know someone who is rich and bitter. Most of us have also had the privilege of meeting a materially poor person who felt grateful for having received many blessings. Similarly, many people who have been visited by tragedy are grateful for the gift of life, while others who have led sheltered existences continually complain of the raw deal they have gotten.

Some of the priests and religious who come to our institute are initially bitter and blaming people. They hold others responsible for their misfortunes. They complain that they have been scapegoated for years. They speak of having been continually mistreated and unappreciated.

As treatment progresses, a good sign of progress is a slow change of perspective. They begin to see themselves more objectively, recognizing their virtues as well as their faults. They empathize a bit more with the superiors and confreres who have had to live with their negative attitudes. Eventually, they begin to express gratitude for what they have been given and gratitude for the patience others have shown toward them.

Christians are eucharistic people; that is, they give thanks. Preeminently, they give thanks through the celebration of the sacramental Eucharist. An important sign of an alive, spiritual person is a grateful heart. On the other hand, when our hearts become narrow and bitter, it is a clear sign that our spirits are asphyxiating.

FACING OUR INNER SELVES

I vividly recall a particular conversation with a bishop several months ago. After discussing with him an assessment of one of his priests, who had serious psychological and physical difficulties, I pointed out that there were no signs that the man had a substantial spiritual life. I added that we saw no indication of a personal relationship with God; nor did the priest profess to have one. Similarly, he engaged in

few, if any, spiritual practices and was an isolated man. I told the bishop that the man's spiritual life had apparently ceased at some point. The bishop responded, “I don't think he ever had one.”

Indeed, our spiritual selves can remain dormant if never accessed or nourished. One of the goals of a formation program is to energize and give form to someone's spiritual life. The bishop believed that the assessed priest had never gotten in touch with his spiritual self.

On the other hand, most of us in ministry have gotten in touch with our spiritual selves at some point in our lives. This is an important reason that many of us entered ministry in the first place. But for those who are asphyxiating, this spiritual life faltered somewhere along the road.

The reasons are varied, but one consistent theme stands out: fear. On more than one occasion, priests or religious in distress have told me that they stopped praying and spending time in silence with God. When I asked them why, they said they were afraid of listening to God and to their own inner selves. They were afraid of what would surface.

To restart gently the process of facing our inner selves, I have sometimes used guided meditations. One of the meditations I used with a group of priests in treatment began with the men imagining themselves walking in a bright, sunny field. Then they were asked to imagine descending into a cold, dark cave, where the door closed behind them, and they were alone.

Later we discussed their experiences in the cave. One priest, who suffered from anxieties and phobias, surprised himself when he imagined a dark, hairy, ugly monster in the cave with him. He feared and detested the figure and hoped that I would not use that particular meditation again.

However, the group was profiting from the meditation, and that priest in particular seemed to be getting in touch with something important. So we continued for several days, descending into the dark cave. Again and again, the man met this ugly, hairy beast that frightened and disgusted him.

Finally, after several sessions, the priest found greater ease in being with the beast. The creature was increasingly less repugnant to him, and by the end of the sessions, he actually looked forward to the meditations and to encountering his beast. Not surprisingly, the priest's anxieties began simultaneously to diminish markedly. He was facing his inner self, overcoming his fears, and living in peace with the part of himself that he had formerly perceived as ugly and disgusting. It was not that the beast had disappeared; rather, the priest had learned to live in peace with it.

Unfortunately, some have not yet overcome their fear and disgust at facing their inner selves. Thus, their spiritual lives cease, and a variety of maladies can ensue. It is no wonder that Jesus often encouraged his followers by saying, "Do not be afraid."

AIDS TO SPIRITUAL HEALTH

Keeping spiritually alive and growing is not an easy task. It involves courage, commitment, and hard work. For example, there should be a daily commitment to private prayer. One can always find reasons to justify not praying, especially when involved in a busy ministry.

I recall one young priest suffering from significant difficulties, who told me, "I don't have time to pray." My spontaneous response was, "Then you don't have time to be a priest."

Another priest in trouble told me that a retreat master had recommended a daily Holy Hour. The priest found the idea preposterous and told me so. But it has been my experience that a daily Holy Hour is not only possible within a busy ministry but actually a source of increased productivity and fruitfulness.

A preeminent way in which we spiritually "breathe" is in prayer. There can be little hope for one's spiritual life without recourse to regular, private prayer. This is an ancient spiritual truth that is still vital today.

Of course, there are many other aids to a spiritual life. Of themselves, they do not necessarily ensure spiritual vibrancy, but they do facilitate its attainment. Frequent recourse to the Sacrament of Reconciliation can be a way of facing hindrances to spiritual growth and asking for God's healing. Similarly, spiritual direction can be essential, especially for those who maintain a spiritual exterior but are unaware of what lies beneath.

There are many aids to spiritual growth that Christians have found helpful. These include scriptural meditation, sacramental liturgies, ascetical practices, centering prayer, retreats, spiritual reading, prayer groups, and pilgrimages.

Like the idiosyncrasy of spiritual symptoms, the things that individuals find spiritually helpful will vary between persons and over time. Flexibility and openness to the movement of the Spirit are the key.

A JOYOUS PEACE

Although an authentic spiritual life requires hard work and, at times, involves the painful and fearful task of facing the "beast" within, the rewards of being spiritually alive flow in abundance.

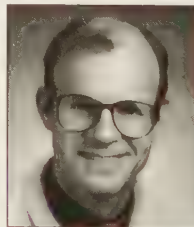
When we are spiritually alive, it means that we are living *en theos*. Thus, just as blood flows through our veins, bringing life-giving oxygen, the presence of God flows through our spirits, bringing life. When God is in us, we mirror the Divine attributes. We become passionate, creative, enthusiastic people. We know how to laugh and enjoy; we also know how to grieve and sorrow. Rather than becoming sour and bitter, our hearts fill with gratitude.

Most important, we know a great inner peace. We face our "beast" within and, after much struggle and tears, find it is not as ugly as we thought; we look forward to its presence. Or, like the Gerasene demoniac healed by Jesus, we become "fully clothed" and "perfectly sane"; thus, we can sit and rest.

Saint Bruno was the founder of the strict Carthusian eremitic order. Despite the order's asceticism, he described its life as a "peace that the world knows not and joy in the Holy Spirit." Indeed, a joyous peace is the ultimate sign of a spirit that is fully alive.

Spiritual asphyxiation, like hypoxia, is a subtle and deadly killer. It strangles the creativity, joy, and enthusiasm that are gifts of the Divine Spirit. As difficult as it is to recognize and diagnose spiritual dysfunction, there can be no full recovery to health without a healthy human spirit.

It is my hope that we will begin to work more systematically and diligently on the symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment of spiritual dysfunction. We may find that many psychological disorders are actually sequelae of a deterioration of the human spirit.



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Dysfunction in Community

Suzanne Mayer, I.H.M., Ph.D.

The affinity between a woman's capacity for hope and her capacity for sorrow is so close that one may be said to be a consequence of the other.—Blanche Mary Kelly, The Sudden Rose

The other day I was talking to a sister who visits periodically to speak of things spiritual and to get a little perspective in her life. She has a history marked by trauma, tragedy, and triumph, having moved beyond a life of being shuffled from one parent to the other (at times neither had “any time to take us kids into their homes”) and into a life of great insight, personal growth, and ministry to others. One area that has much troubled her recently is what she calls the dysfunctionality in her local situation. “The game playing, denial of feelings, perfectionism, workaholicism,” she said, “are so much like what I knew when I lived with a family that was disintegrating that it scares me.”

Another sister, from a very small religious province in which she, in her forties, is the youngest member, wondered about the lack of vitality and vision she sees among the sisters of her community. “Of course, I worry now about my future,” she said. “It seems at times that we have very little hope of surviving beyond the next decade. But as I look back over my years in religious life, I have to say that maybe it is

our own fault. It is almost as if there is something defective in the very nature of who we are and how we identify ourselves as religious—as if the lack of life is part of our charism.”

CULTURE OF DENIAL

These words and similar comments by other sisters led me to pick up a book I had shelved several years ago—*The Addictive Organization* by Anne Wilson-Schaefer and Diane Fassel. The authors argue that the problem today is “not just individuals who are multiply addicted or families who are codependent” but “a generic addictive process. . . . The problem is not that there are people running around with addictive personalities; there exists an addictive process that underlies an addictive system, and it surrounds and influences all of us.”

So I wondered: If corporations, hospitals, schools, and other institutions can be strongly affected by the “addictive process”—and Wilson-Schaefer and Fassel detail many such institutions—might this also be true of religious congregations? Many writers on religious life, coming from both empirical and experiential viewpoints, attest to the profound effect that postmodern culture has had on religious life. Could the aspects of postmodern culture emphasized in the literature on addiction, codependency, and related phenomena explain some of the struggles of women

religious trying to channel the ideals of community into daily practice? *Culture of Recovery, Culture of Denial*—a recent report from a national research group, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate—seems to answer these questions with a resounding yes. The researchers describe a “culture of recovery” among the increasing number of men and women religious who have been made aware of their addiction to alcohol and who have sought and received help to remain “clean and sober.” They also examine a “culture of denial” among congregational leaders who ignore, minimize, or deny what is a serious societal and community problem. The researchers cite some revealing statistics to support their observations:

The alcoholism rate among women religious—2.6 percent—is also a concern. While it appears to be lower than the alcoholism rate for other professional women, the alcoholism rate for women religious is still higher than superiors seem to believe. . . . Superiors overwhelmingly see alcoholism as a minimal problem in their communities, while alcoholic religious overwhelmingly see it as a moderate problem.

CODEPENDENCY IN COMMUNITY

Women religious, much more than men (13.7 versus 9.4 percent), display a tendency toward denial, adopting an “if I don’t see it, it isn’t there” mentality. This gender difference is not really surprising when placed within the framework of male and female approaches to addiction over the past half century. It was not until 1970 that the first article to deal with alcohol addiction among women religious was published. At that time researchers were just beginning to explore another addictive phenomenon—one that helps explain women’s reluctance to look at chemical abuse issues. That phenomenon is codependency—a cycle of dysfunctionality that affects not just individuals with identified problems but whole families. Underscored in the literature on codependency is the inclination of the drug or alcohol abuser’s partner (most frequently the wife) to turn to the denial defense in dealing with the problem.

Can recent work in codependency give some insight and direction to communities, both at-large and local, for dealing not only with alcohol abuse but also with other problems of addictive living and dysfunctionality? Can it suggest what exists within communities of women religious that supports an addictive and denying lifestyle? And just as important as tracing the causes, what might be said of the cure? How might approaches to the treatment of codependency and the healing of dysfunctional systems lead to some answers for vital religious living in the postmodern world?

REDEFINING VIRTUE

Perhaps the causes of an addictive and denying lifestyle can be traced to the very roots of feminine development. In work on relationship models of feminine identity, much has been revealed about women’s view of goodness—virtue—as self-sacrifice, loyalty to significant others, and preservation of familial bonds. Secrecy and even silence serve to preserve the untouchable domain of what transpires behind closed doors, leading women to a voiceless and often powerless role within the societies they inhabit. For many women, the inability to articulate and honor their own needs and to value and use their voices leads to a dependent, passive orientation to others. Virtue within such a framework is seen as submissiveness, total otherness, subjugation of self, and long-suffering silence. While the image of the “good sister” as the epitome of such virtues has died a not-so-quiet death, the image of the religious woman as gifted by God to be fully free and human has not entirely come to birth. Susan Nelson-Dunfee, wife and mother, theologian and feminist, articulates the problem in her article “The Sin of Hiding” (*Soundings*, Fall 1982) as follows:

As long as the highest human virtue is self-sacrifice, and as long as the long-suffering, totally self-giving wife/mother is the symbol our tradition uplifts as true woman, then woman cannot answer the call to accept her human freedom without knowing the guilt of being named by the tradition, as well as herself, as assertive, self-centered, unfeminine—and, finally, as sinner.

Society in general and ecclesial norms in particular compound the struggle of women religious to move out of unhealthy processes of formation. Given the traditional male models of morality, spirituality, and vowed living—which define autonomy and individuation as maturity, set boundaries with hierarchical structures, and emphasize the cardinal sins of pride, greed, and anger—women religious find themselves in a catch-22 situation. If they listen to the voice within, calling them to full freedom and humanity as children of a loving and relational God—if they attend to the urge within themselves to grow to a caring morality and interrelated maturity—if they struggle to form not pyramids of authority but webs of connectedness—they often meet both secular and ecclesial obstacles. As Jo Nol notes in a chapter of *Feminist Perspectives on Addictions* (edited by Nan van den Bergh), “In our patriarchal efforts to deny the vulnerable aspects of ourselves, we can embrace a blinding array of substances designed to mask any evidence of the ordinary aches and pains inherent in being human. . . . Women tend to turn the struggle back

on themselves in forms such as eating disorders, depression and submission within relationships.”

PERFECTIONISM MISTAKEN FOR MATURITY

Compounding the difficulties imposed by the lack of a feminine voice is the challenge for women religious to overcome the unrealistic and unreasonable expectations imposed on them—not only by standards of spiritual growth that incline toward perfectionism but also by others who judge by those standards, as well as by themselves. Too often, equating sinfulness with lack of perfection has only strengthened the tendency of women to strive toward unattainable goals. This tendency is reinforced within communities of women who work as professionals within institutions whose populations demand not only skill and competence but also daily excellence. As teachers, nurses, caregivers, and administrators of schools, hospitals, and orphanages, sisters have held, within the domain of their care, the minds, spirits, lives, and souls of others. A friend of mine, a principal of a large and challenging school, has stated frequently, “If we ran our schools the way many of these businesses we deal with run their operations, we would be closed down within a month.”

Spiritually, these same women have taken the call of Christ to “be perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48) far beyond the literal and correctly translated limits. In many scriptural references, the mandate to *perfection*, translated in the Pauline letters from the Greek *teleioi*, means “spiritual maturity” (Heb. 5:12; Phil. 3:15), as seen in such evidence as being “open to the indwelling Spirit” (1Cor. 3:1) and “relating to God and others in love” (Eph. 4:13). Spiritual maturity calls for many of the characteristics closest to genuine feminine development: interrelatedness, care, receptivity, and openness. Yet these are not the yardsticks against which most women religious measure themselves.

DYSFUNCTIONAL BACKGROUNDS COMMON

Finally, in looking at some foundational sources of codependence within religious societies, it is necessary to consider seriously the increasing number of entrants from dysfunctional backgrounds. Already loaded down with unspoken family rules and roles learned during early histories of conflict, chaos, and even violence, and lacking dependable family ties, more and more candidates come seeking the stability, order, and acceptance they did not know as children. It is almost a given that those drawn to ministries of service often grew up accepting the demands of responsibility, accountability, and total

other-orientation that characterize the “hero” or “savior” role. Furthermore, recent research shows a direct link between vocational choices in ministry and other service professions and unhealthy family-of-origin influences. Individuals who have chosen such work are “driven by codependent needs,” as Frank Stalfa reports in “Vocation as Autobiography” (*Journal of Pastoral Care*, Winter 1994). Such findings do not necessarily demand that religious communities exclude candidates with such histories, but they do underscore the need to uncover hidden motivations and to work through the aftermath of negative familial influences within formation. As Wilson-Schaefer and Fassel note, “Codependents can replicate their dysfunctional family patterns and modes of response even when there is no addict available to be the recipient of their behaviors.”

REVISIONING FOR RECOVERY

In religious life, whether codependent behaviors are seen in responses of passivity or perfectionism, or in states of depression or anger—indeed, whether they are located within the individual or the institution—the first step toward recovery is awareness. The church itself, in addressing its unhealthy attitudes toward women, has stressed education, correct information, and revisioning as the major vehicles to begin remediation. First, women must identify the sources that have stilled their voices, whether those sources lie within ecclesial history, past scriptural exegesis, or restrictive structures. Education should include a psychosocial/religious dimension that allows congregations to look deeply at their roots, as they were challenged to do by Vatican II, and to identify which of their traditions, practices, and policies foster dependence or codependence rather than interdependence. The revisioning thus inspired must permeate the whole of the religious congregation, from the leadership to the last pre-entrance candidate.

One way leaders can set an example of healthy claiming of voice is to model a calling to accountability. Thomas B. Drummond—a psychiatrist who has worked extensively with troubled religious—has observed many instances of enabling victimization, dependency, and hostility among leaders of dioceses and congregations. He sees such behavior in leaders’ toleration of the inappropriate actions of “problem members” in order to avoid conflict, or in a misguided sense of charity that sees an acting-out sister or brother as “too fragile” or “unable to accept the truth.” He identifies it in a local community’s acceptance of intolerable behavior in a religious because he or she has “always acted that way.” He traces it in the

patterns of passive-aggressivity, immature dependency, and hostile withdrawal or isolation tolerated for years within convents, monasteries, and rectories because it has been easier, calmer, or safer to turn a blind eye on them. Religious leaders who want their communities to become healthier environments that promote life-giving behaviors need to mark, confront, and counteract negative tendencies in persons within the community, as well as in the various parts of the system itself. While at first this approach may seem harsh and uncaring, it is in fact the very opposite.

Speaking out of their organizational milieu, Wilson-Schaefer and Fassel note that the farther institutions move from their original ideal and the more encumbered they become with structures, rules, and layers, the "sicker" the system and those within it become. To those in religious life, this observation resonates in terms of refounding and rediscovery of the spirit of their original charism. It also ties into Drummond's call to "enablers" within a community to let go of disempowerment and the rigidity that is its source and to open up to flexibility and, consequently, to empowerment. He defines flexibility as "the state of having more than one way to think, feel or act about a situation," which perhaps amounts to true Pauline perfection—that is, "spiritual maturity" and "openness to the Spirit."

If members of a congregation are to work together, they must foster life-giving choices and work toward what Stalfa calls "generative caregiving"—that is, caregiving along the lines of Erikson's model of adult development, balancing a care of and for others with a healthy care of and for self. By fostering generativity, a congregation cooperatively combats two detrimental outgrowths of codependent formation: the fostering of perfectionism and the inclination to mask needs behind addictive behaviors, including distorted behaviors that are often accepted in communal living, such as workaholicism, media addiction, and overeating.

Women religious have entered the vowed life with many expectations. A primary expectation is that they will grow and mature in God, with and through

the support, nurturance, and love of their sisters. When the very environment of growth is marked by dysfunctionality—whether manifested in chronic depression or chronic "niceness," in cold hostility or the avoidance of all conflict, in messages of expected excellence or the failure to challenge toward potential—the soil becomes the "barren ground where the rough terrain does not allow for any growth" (Matt. 13:5). If many of those entering religious life are "too young and tender" because of unhealthy family backgrounds or other impairing developmental influences, then the likelihood of their "being burnt dry because their roots lack depth" is high (Matt. 13:6). What we must nourish, in this time of decreasing members and increasing calls to ministry, is "good soil" in which the few may bear "much grain, in the thirty, sixty and hundredfold" (Matt 13:8).

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American Sexual Morality's Decline

Robert McCown, S.J., M.A.

Whatever the merits or demerits of the secularism we inherited from the Enlightenment, the moral code of human sexuality it gave us is now rapidly losing ground in its intentions of guiding men and women toward personally fulfilling sex lives and fostering stability in marriage. In America, a secondary result of this phenomenon is the present epidemic of teenage pregnancies, with its effects not only on the lives of young single parents and the children they bring into the world but also on our society.

The weakness of the Clinton administration's moral focus was illustrated by President Clinton's visit last year to a large Washington junior high school, attended by students aged 13 to 15. The school was chosen as a place to make major televised statements on two national problems: the spread of AIDS and teenage pregnancies. But the president sidestepped the questions of whether abstinence should be a desirable lifestyle for young people and whether marriage should be seen as the only proper place for sexual intercourse. Essentially, his message was limited to "Be careful—use a condom." Could he not bring himself to tell these children, some of them the age of his own daughter, that they are simply not ready—physically, morally, or economically—for sexual intercourse and its consequences, in spite of their natural curiosity and desire?

ASSUMPTIONS OF PROMISCUITY

Permission for sexual activity at almost any age, provided that it can be kept "safe"—implicit in the president's words—is repeated in signals coming from the health and education departments of his administration. It is also repeated daily in our national media. Popular music, films, and commercials do not merely cater to general sexual interests in young audiences; they assume an attitude of sexual freedom and directly target it. We hear the same message, in one form or another, from virtually every other organ of communication in our society, with the exception of conservative Jewish groups, some Protestant churches, and the Roman Catholic church. But in order to get their message out, those communities must rely on the largely liberal media—and that message often ends up edited into perfunctory or misleading statements that seem ridiculous or antihuman.

Moreover, in our society of rapidly changing practices, parental influence in sexual matters is often confused, absent, or simply overwhelmed by social trends. Thus, younger and younger children, confusing love with sex, and having few examples in their lives showing the true purpose of sex, are left to follow a series of Pied Pipers of permissiveness. Teenage

girls—often from poor, single-parent households, with no model of faithful marital love in their lives—seek affection in sexual encounters, often with boys or men lacking any inkling of male parental responsibility. These girls are bearing children or having abortions, with permanent effects on their physical, moral, and intellectual development. Left to bear and rear their children alone, they—as well as the children—are the more obvious casualties. But many of the men, too, will long feel the effects of their role in such encounters and their subsequent failure to take responsibility for the results.

CONSEQUENCES OF CASUAL SEX

The spiral will continue, for there is nothing in sight to check its momentum. Consider this: at the present time in the United States, there are four times as many children living in poverty as there were in the 1960s—the decade in which the mentality of liberated sex worked its way out of the private lives of relatively few adherents and into many of the nation's campuses, media outlets, government agencies, and churches, as well as the general consciousness. It is now predicted that at the end of the 1990s, more than half of the children in America will be born to unmarried parents. These same children, lacking guidance as their parents did, will enter readily into noncommitted encounters and produce more dysfunctional children. Thus, we see emerging a culture in which the most important underpinning of a creative human relationship is reduced to a trivial encounter that can have severe repercussions. The individuals and institutions that have promoted “liberated” sex during the past three decades must take responsibility for the havoc caused in America by the resulting mentality and for its disastrous spillover into other areas of society.

MORAL PERSPECTIVE NEEDED

To check or even to slow down this spiral, we must have clear reasons, both personal and social, for sexual responsibility—reasons likely to enter the consciences of young people at the family and school levels but also suited to adult thinking. We must restore the conviction that the purpose of sex, beyond the joy and enrichment of spouses, is procreation, to enrich society. An attitude of casualness or irresponsibility toward procreation, besides destroying couples' marital peace, is in subtle ways communicated to their children and produces in them confusion about sexual matters.

Certain perennial insights from the Judeo-Christian system of values speak of the role of sexuality—both

in the individual's quest for happiness and in the commonwealth's quest for fullness. Though open to refinement in their application in different ages and cultures, they offer a cluster of truths that have long provided answers, and will continue to provide them, to such questions as: What brings fulfillment and joy in marriage? What brings misery? How does marriage as an institution contribute to the health of society? These truths have been known and accepted for nearly two millennia by moralists and legislators of both the West and the East, as well as by an unbroken line of thinkers. Many of our contemporaries, having integrated them into their own lives, express gratitude for them.

Unfortunately, although the church's accumulated wisdom on this subject is unmatched by any other institution's, its authority regarding sexual morality has for several decades been obscured by the confusing gap between the Vatican's pronouncements on birth control and the practices of the majority of Catholic couples. A result of this, as sociologist Andrew Greeley has pointed out in *America* (17 November 1992), is that a surprising majority of young Catholics, no longer accepting the church's teachings in sexual matters, are engaging in premarital sex—although otherwise they are increasingly practicing their faith.

“I'm seeing this man (or woman)”; “I'm having a relationship with . . .”—I hear such postmodern euphemisms while counseling former students and others, and the frequency with which I hear them drives home to me how many young Catholic men and women have been touched by the sexual revolution. Yet from the note of sadness sometimes evident in their voices, I suspect that they are feeling the effects of its downside to various degrees, depending on their values and expectations. I know that questions have arisen in their hearts: What have these relations given me, and what have they taken away, in the long run and in the short? If there is some gain, is it permanent? If some loss, is it remediable?

COMMITMENT ESSENTIAL TO JOY

It is not the pleasure of sexual intercourse that seals a relationship; rather, it is the parties' commitment of permanent fidelity to each other. A central gift of a faithful union is marital peace, often described as an ever-deepening joy in the experience of being loved for oneself, simply because one is considered a unique and wonderful person in the eyes of that dear other, and the accompanying commitment to love in return. Among the fruits of marital peace are the sexual intimacy and caring the partners are able to create out of their love. Those who have this mysterious peace say there is nothing like it in God's

creation, short of Heaven. And small wonder, too, because in the sacramental union of marriage, it is the love of Christ himself that is given one to the other. This deepest human act of personal communication fosters joyful peace only when linked with a fidelity that is durable.

But taking a vow does not in itself give fidelity; only if integrity is there can the vow consecrate it to fidelity. When individuals lack or ignore the intention of fidelity and thus abuse its mysterious bonding power, sexual intercourse becomes a lie of the deepest sort, producing proportionate emotional and spiritual damage. Two persons are involved in a marriage. If one is sincere in his or her expressions of love and fidelity, but the other is not or is incapable of commitment, the committed person suffers grave harm. He or she comes to realize that this other, to whom he or she has made a gift of self at the deepest level possible, has found the gift unsatisfactory and has moved on. The resulting disaffections and separations are always accompanied by deception, anger, pain, shattered self-images, and bitter discouragement. In any subsequent relationship, the injured party, seeking to avoid experiencing such pain again, hedges his or her commitment, settling for less—and the vows exchanged, lacking depth, fall short of effecting a true bond.

Noncommitted or precommitment sex is more than risky; it is a game that one cannot win. Besides, it is a flawed way to look for a future spouse or to carry on a courtship. A certain psychic gravity, or weight, is central to sexual intimacy. True commitment between a man and a woman holds their union firm and deepens it, fortifying it against future trials. Partners lacking such commitment, no matter how physically exciting sex between them may be, move not toward a true and permanent union but in the opposite direction, toward a degradation of the relationship and, ultimately, infidelity. Generally speaking, a person who is promiscuous before marriage is, barring some radical conversion in his or her life, a poor risk for fidelity in marriage.

BLINDED BY PASSION

Moreover, it is, I feel, very difficult to elevate an ongoing noncommitted sexual relationship to a higher level—that is, to make it into one that is truly committed. This is apparent when I consider the problems of a growing number of former students and other counselees. Typically, they enter into casual sexual relations with someone—“to get close to each other”—which develop into “a wonderful passion.” The more absorbing that passion is, however, the more it tends to obscure the underlying realities of

the relationship. Perhaps the individuals begin living together, professing not to need the ritual of marriage—thus exhibiting, among other things, contemporary youth’s hidden fear of that institution. After a time, however, feeling their relationship becoming stale, they try to shore it up with a vow of sorts or even an attempt at marriage. But often they find themselves unable or unwilling—that same psychic gravity being against them—to confront differences never before considered: differences in looking at families and in-laws and each other’s friends; differences in cultural interests, in coping with disappointment or failure, in attitudes toward future children, money, religion, and long-range intentions of fidelity. Their earlier passion had blinded them from seeing such differences, any one of which could threaten their union.

Noncommitted relationships, entered into without the sanction of family, church, or society, are nearly as easy to get out of as they are to get into—although they leave indelible marks on both parties involved. Marriage is indeed a risky business, but the risk should be in what life the couple hope to find in and through their mutual commitment of fidelity, made before consummation—not in whether they will be able to find permanency in a noncommitted sexual enjoyment of each other, no matter how thrilling.

TESTING PASSION’S VERACITY

Unfortunately, the pervasive cultural acceptance of casual sex entices young people—whether in love or imagining themselves to be—to pass easily over the great divide into noncommitted intercourse. Thus, they forgo another vital constituent of a solid marriage, the period of engagement. Engagement allows time to season the commitment, when two individuals’ devotion to each other, together with their not-yet-satisfied sexual desires, impels them to develop non-coital expressions of affection and caring—that is, to practice control. It also gives them time to test the veracity of their passion for each other and their intentions of fidelity, and thus to build a foundation for confidence and trust in the future. Yet all the while, they remain free to withdraw from such an engagement without the trauma of a break-off from a sexually compromised one.

In contrast, couples who follow their passions—thus taking a shortcut, before or without a bonded commitment, to arrive at what they immaturely perceive marriage to be—risk sooner or later experiencing in the sexual union itself what Prospero, in Shakespeare’s *Tempest*, predicts: “Sour-eye’d disdain, and discord, shall bestrew the union of your bed with weeds so loathly you both shall hate it.”

ROMANTIC INTOXICATION

Abstinence from intercourse during courtship is advisable for another reason. During the first months of physical intimacy in marriage, the partners usually experience an intense romantic intoxication—an emotional high that they think will never end but that in reality lasts only a few months. Though limited, this is a time of special grace—of gathering momentum, as it were—to enable them to continue to discover each other, warts and all, while finding in the joy of their union the generosity and strength to make necessary adjustments in their lives together. Some couples claim that despite the sense of intoxication, the early months of marriage prove to be the most difficult. Still, during this intense period, they are able to lay the groundwork for a relationship strong enough to withstand the stresses of their future life together and ample enough to provide a center of love for their children.

As this brief romantic period ends, another growth must already be firmly established—one rooted in the couple's strong intention to strive, with self-sacrifice, to create and to hold—over the long haul, for better or for worse—a life of mature marital love. This latter union should and often does remain vital for the rest of their lives, and from its peace the couple can derive sexual fulfillment even into old age, and serve as an example of lasting fidelity to their community.

Conversely, if marriage partners have already accorded each other sexual privileges during courtship, or if one or both of them have been through a series of such relationships, they often find their time of building up romantic momentum to be short-lived; this is because their head of romantic steam has been squandered on previous affairs. Such individuals are likely to complain, "I'm losing that feeling and can't get it back." Though perhaps performed with an acquired skill, their intercourse will not have the mysterious creative power to unify, and the couple will be less able or ready to make the adjustments in their lives that will assure peace in the future. Many marriages taking place in America today are of this kind.

CHALLENGE OF ABSTINENCE

If the ideal of abstinence in courtship is challenging for inexperienced lovers, it is doubly so for those

who were sexually active before they began to seek a spouse or before they became engaged. Often they protest, "Must I carry on a courtship as if I were a virgin?" But in spite of what the secular world out there tells us, sincerely attempting abstinence is the path most sure to lead to peace in the marriage proposed. Indeed, when true devotion is present, the lovers themselves often long to cultivate abstinence before their marriage, supporting each other in their generous resolve to temper and affirm their faithful love. And that is possible, provided that they add another ingredient, prayer, to cultivate an interior realignment of values and a strengthening of resolve. In addition, by accepting the healing and the re-creation of the spirit of love, they can find a renewal of innocence—indeed, a rebirth of the mysterious romantic intoxication between a man and a woman—as well as an added joy in future years of marriage. This is part of the Good News that Christ came to give us, and his promises include a crowning of marital peace, which he certainly wants for us infinitely more than we want it for ourselves.

A short while ago, I was astonished by a comment made by a woman I was counseling. After declaring that she and her husband had for a dozen years had a good and sexually satisfying marriage, she added, "Although we had only a few affairs during our college years, until our dying day, we will both regret that we were not virgins when we married." To this I must add that I have never yet counseled a man or a woman in a satisfactory marriage who claimed to be glad about having slept around before marriage.

Whatever President Clinton's attitude toward the Judeo-Christian ideal of sexuality may be, it will certainly influence decisions coming from his administration—and those decisions will in turn influence, in subtle and not-so-subtle ways, the growth to maturity and the sexual health of a great many young Americans.



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Adult Transitions in Women's Lives

Mary Jo Moran, H.M., Ph.D.

As a middle-aged woman who recognizes that a great many of the problems of aging are the problems of women, I am extremely interested in the transitions women experience as they age. In the past twenty years, researchers have focused not only on the essential nature and characteristics of these developmental transitions but also on how they manifest themselves in the lives of women from midlife on.

In her book *Passing Through Transitions*, Naomi Golan, a professor of social work at the University of Haifa, Israel, writes that even as the pace of our world and our lives increases exponentially, transitions are

a common experience that all of us go through repeatedly in the course of our lives: the leaving of an old familiar world and the entry into an unknown new one, the passing from one relatively stable state into an interval of strangeness and uncertainty on the way to a new stable state.

Periods of stability alternate with periods of transition. During our times of stability, we design our lives through the choices we make and the goals we set. During transitions, we examine our life plan by asking questions and assessing fresh possibilities. Many psychologists agree that a transition involves three phases: an ending (i.e., a process of either total

or partial loss and separation), an in-between time, and a beginning.

PHASE ONE: ENDING

We must acknowledge and process the first phase of a transition, the ending, before we can begin something new. In his book *Transitions*, management consultant William Bridges states that "new growth cannot take root on ground still covered with the old, and endings are the clearing process." Because transitions require a break with what is familiar, endings are characterized by disengagement, disidentification, disenchantment, and disorientation. Disenchantment often introduces transitional periods. It invites us to look beneath the surface of what we thought was true. It requires us to recognize that reality, as we have perceived it, was only in our heads. Change begins to work its magic or wreak its havoc (depending on our stance) with disengagement. However, if change is clarified and sustained, it can lead to developmental growth and revitalization.

Uncertainty about identity commonly occurs during transitions. Unshackling our ideas about who we think we are allows us to consider new, fuller, more accurate identities. Such inward movement often gives rise not only to uncertainty but also to feelings

Our desire to grow vies with our resistance to change

of vulnerability, fear, and lack of safety. Our world, with us in it, is falling apart. Disorientation sets in and affects our sense of time and space. At times of ending, we must let go of what was—both outwardly and internally—before we can embrace what is.

PHASE TWO: IN-BETWEEN TIME

Phase two—the in-between time—often falsely appears, both to outside observers and to ourselves, to be unproductive. Emptiness and chaos mark our immediate experience. However, we are engaged in some of life's most important work—the inner work that often results in an expanded sense of reality and a deepened sense of purpose. We must create a time and space away from what is familiar in order to experience in-between time in its fullness. We must grieve the passing of life as we knew it so that new life can emerge.

Writing about in-between time in *Transitions*, Bridges contends that “‘what to do’ consists not of ways out but of ways in—that is, it involves ways of amplifying and making more real the essential neutral-zone experience. The way out is the way in.” Clarifying what we want and what we allow to stand in our way is essential. Self-imposed limitations are part of what is ending. For it is the past that offers us the possibilities and limitations of change—even when we choose to change the present.

Submission to the internal emptiness is the first in-between-time activity; next, it is essential to enter into the process that is taking place. Bridges describes the resulting chaos: it is not a mess, “but rather . . . the primal state of pure energy to which the person returns for every true new beginning.” In-between time provides us with a view of life that we can get nowhere else. As we experience successive transitions, we find ourselves on the road leading to wisdom.

PHASE THREE: NEW BEGINNING

The final phase of a transition, the beginning, emerges from the darkness of the in-between time. It usually makes itself known as an inner signal or image alerting us that something new is imminent. Bridges proposes that “genuine beginnings depend upon this kind of inner realignment rather than on external shifts, for when we are aligned with deep longings . . . we become powerfully motivated.” This motivation is essential in distinguishing that something new has begun and that we are not avoiding the unpleasantness of the in-between time by repeating life patterns. Amplifying these ideas, Golan suggests that

a transitional phase comes to an end not when the particular marker event occurs or when a developmental sequence is completed, but when the tasks of questioning and exploring choices have lost their urgency and the person makes his crucial commitments and is ready to start building, living within, and enhancing a new life structure.

Change is an integral part of the transition process and also an unavoidable result of normal aging. Our desire to grow vies with our resistance to change; Golan maintains that “different kinds of change can be distinguished in terms of a balance between continuity, growth and loss.” A transition is, of necessity, a part of the natural process of self-renewal—one lap on the track of life.

COPING WITH TRANSITIONS

Time periods (passages from one chronological stage to another in the life cycle), role shifts (adding, consolidating, exchanging, or eliminating vital social roles), and marker events (geographical, socioeconomic, physical, or physiological transformational points that begin and shape the period of change) all characterize transitions. During transitions, the changes we face may be internal and/or external.

Development is portrayed by life-span psychologists Marjorie Fiske and David Chiriboga, in *Change and Continuity in Adult Life*, as “codetermined by the internal structure and external sociocultural circumstances; changes in either create the conditions for development change.” Sometimes we initiate the new experiences, and sometimes they are thrust upon us.

Throughout life, we develop our own unique style of dealing with endings and beginnings and managing the time in between them. Nonetheless, transitions are often lonely and painful times. Although these passages are normal life experiences, they are quite often upsetting. They take their toll on us physically, mentally, and psychologically, and they definitely influence our relationships with other people.

Psychologists have been able to identify certain sociopsychological characteristics that assist the individual in progressing through transitions at certain times in the life cycle. In *Four Stages of Life*, Marjorie Lowenthal and her colleagues note that “the anticipation of an impending transition often serves as a stimulus to examine, and possibly to reorient, goals and aspirations, and to reassess personal resources and impediments in the light of the probability of their attainment.”

Every phase of life has its required developmental work. If we fail to complete it, we bring unfinished business into the next phase. Therefore, life provides us with periodic times of readjustment. As Bridges writes, “Adulthood unfolds its promise in a rhythm of expansion and contraction, change and stability. . . . Change accumulates slowly and almost invisibly until it is made manifest in the sudden form of fledging out or thawing.” The study of adult lives is inherently complex because of the importance of considering both personal experiential history and social change over time.

Transitions always involve change, and change always involves letting go. While in transition, we recognize the need to move on. Our days alternate between negative feelings (e.g., of just getting by, of plodding through life) and positive feelings (e.g., of well-being, of coming home to ourselves). In choosing to let go, we empower ourselves to move forward and let go of whatever is binding us to the past. Our own new growth becomes visible through concrete changes in our physical, social, psychological, and/or spiritual lives.

CHANGES AFTER MIDLIFE

What changes do women experience in the second half of life? How are they manifested in women’s lives, bodies, psyches, and spirits? How do changes help us become the women we are capable of being?

In a research study they conducted, Lowenthal and her coworkers found that “whether the pending transition was incremental or decremental, some anticipated it as an opportunity for growth and expansion, others as surrender to the socially required or the personally inevitable.” They also observed that more middle-aged women were unhappy or absentminded than women in other age groups. However, contrary to today’s popular beliefs, midlife women in the study experienced neither menopause nor the departure of their last child from the family home as a devastating event. Instead, they experienced these changes as opportunities to seek new challenges. In addition, Lowenthal and her colleagues found no evidence to support the notion that the value systems of the old are less flexible than those of the young.

The same study indicated that health—both their own and that of close others—is at the top of middle-aged women’s list of stressors. Illness of family members or personal illness caused major changes in the lives of the women studied. However, their coping skills were highly developed. Also, unlike their male counterparts, these women were willing to engage outside sources of support. They seemed to recognize their tendency to repeat patterns and valued the assistance of others in making changes. Generally self-generating and enterprising, these women had a deep desire for personal growth and felt a strong need to break out of family confines. As Fiske and Chiriboga unequivocally insist, “Middle-aged women can hardly get enough novelty, intellectual challenge, excitement, and creativity.” The Lowenthal study supports previous research that suggests that the greater the number of roles in middle age, the greater the flexibility in adapting to the demands of old age. It also indicates that there appears to be a very thin line between the peace and quiet that older women value and boredom, their primary stressor.

Fiske and Chiriboga found that preretirement women (aged 45 to 67; average age, 58) had more friends and richer friendships than people in other stages and were positive about themselves. They were more spontaneous and affectionate than their male counterparts, and they also recognized more complexity in their relationships than did men. Fiske and Chiriboga determined that for women in this age group, “each new relationship and experience is more likely to be embedded in a matrix of similar as well as dissimilar experiences, and all relationships and experiences are more likely to have longer and more complex histories.”

ATTITUDINAL SHIFTS

As women approach retirement, they generally resolve their issues of competence, independence, and interpersonal relations. They see themselves as more assertive and independent. According to Lowenthal and coworkers, they also “indicate more than other women a sense of constraint or self-control: they feel less disorderly, less dramatic, and less self-indulgent.” In addition, as women age, their self-image is based less on their relationships with others than on their own feelings and abilities.

More depression is reported by women as they age. Both significant role losses and the climacteric are usually cited as significant contributions to the onset of depression. Interest in and pursuit of achievement increase for women with the passage of time. Their goals and values give them a sense of continuity in the midst of change. A woman’s stances toward the past and the future are closely linked with her involvement in life.

The Lowenthal study also reveals that as we age, we tend to view our current life stage as the most favorable.

The approach of a transition often provokes reconsideration of the past, assessment of personal assets and liabilities, and projections about the future. Preretirement women set goals that are more realistic than those set at earlier times in their lives, and their ability to cope with life becomes indispensable.

The Lowenthal study suggested that the goals of preretirement women reflect humanitarian and moral purposes as well as religious and philosophical values. In addition, women in this age group believe that they have already experienced the most trying time of their lives. Consequently, the researchers concluded, a future orientation may be an indicator of physical and psychological health in an aging individual. Even though shrinking options tend to characterize aging in our culture, many of the preretirement women in the study reported feeling in their prime.

REFORMULATION OF GOALS

In *Transitions in a Woman's Life*, Ramona Mercer and her colleagues describe a research project in which they studied the relationship of transition to the overall development of eighty women during the life cycle. The investigators found that midlife women took time "to reformulate their life's goals and dreams to begin a new career or other focus." They developed new interests and skills and enhanced their sense of self-worth and zest for living. This study suggested that women repeat this refocusing process as they approach retirement. The researchers found "no sense of retiring to sit in a rocking chair or to disengage from social interactions." In fact, they observed that women became increasingly more creative with age. Consequently, they concluded that physical degeneration does not go hand-in-hand with psychosocial degeneration.

Another common theme for women as they age from 40 to 50 is the awareness of time left—of personal finiteness—rather than time since birth. This realization usually initiates a review of their life values and goals, followed by an evaluation of their life, including acceptance of their successes and failures and, finally, preparation for their ongoing physical deterioration. This evaluation often involves thoughtful consideration of what it means to die and, consequently, what it means to have lived. Not surprisingly, many researchers report a growing sense of interiority in aging women. As women move through their middle years, they become more certain of their identity. Of all the groups in the Lowenthal study, preretirement women had attained the clearest sense of self.

Writing in *Women's Lives* on their study of adult women, Susan Llewelyn and Kate Osborne give some

consideration to the single woman as she ages. They affirm that "being single is far more common than is usually supposed by a society that assumes that people normally live in households of two adults and two children." They report that single women tend not only to have a stronger self-concept than their married counterparts but also to be psychologically androgynous. Personal growth and assertion are also more highly valued by single women than by their married sisters.

These studies of women's developmental transitions and the consequent changes in the second half of life clearly reveal changes characterized by time periods, role shifts, and marker events. The changes undertaken by women were both internal and external and corroborated the presence of a process of transition.

In *The Measure of My Days*, Florida Scott Maxwell, a septuagenarian, describes her experience of aging from a place of internal wisdom:

All is uncharted and uncertain; we seem to lead the way into the unknown. It can feel as though all our lives we have been caught in absurdly small personalities and circumstances and beliefs. Our accustomed shell cracks here, cracks there, and that tiresome rigid person we supposed to be ourselves stretches, expands.

As we age, we grow in our ability both to live our questions and to live with ambiguity. Consequently, we are prepared to enter this phase of our life with increasing creativity, and our gift to the world has no limits except those we fashion ourselves. We proudly add our voices to that of Florida Scott Maxwell, who proclaims that "we who are old know that age is more than a disability. It is an intense and varied experience, almost beyond our capacity at times, but something to be carried high. If it is a long defeat, it is also a victory."

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Spirituality for the Era Ahead

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We live in an extraordinary time and at a crucial juncture in world history: we are entering a new millennium, with the completion of the twentieth century and the commencement of the twenty-first. It is both an exciting time and a dangerous time—but above all, it is a time of great opportunity. There is still time to reexamine our habitat. We cannot live without a sense of place. Our soul cannot exist unless we are aware of both time and place. We must become children of this planet—spiritual earthlings.

Father Thomas Berry, in *The Universe Story*, reminds us of this opportunity when he calls us to reexamine what he calls the Technozoic Age, characterized by the continued industrial exploitation of the earth. He suggests that we consider the inauguration of an Ecozoic Age—one in which the integral unity of humans and nature is restored. The natural world has become a “resource” for human progress, which is often measured by our degree of control over the nonhuman world. But human well-being cannot be achieved by diminishing the well-being of the earth. It is time to move beyond the Technozoic Age, which is destroying the earth, and enter the Ecozoic Age, a new period of creativity that encompasses the entire earth community.

The central commitment of the Ecozoic Age is that the universe is a communion of subjects rather than a collection of objects. The earth cannot survive in fragments. The integral functioning of the planet must be preserved because the well-being of the earth is primary, and human well-being follows from it. Although the earth is resilient and has extensive powers of renewal, it also has a finite and nonrenewable aspect. The Ecozoic Age seeks to bring our human activities on the earth into alignment with other planetary forces so that a creative balance can be achieved. To quote a Benedictine saying, “The challenge is to learn to respond immediately to whatever it is time for.” It is now time for us to revisit our cosmic experiences in order to understand the calling of wisdom—the core of our spirituality.

Astrologers tell us that the planetary forces are moving us from the Age of Pisces to the Age of Aquarius. We have been in Pisces—an age emphasizing compassion, sympathy, sacrifice, suffering, mysticism, and love—for approximately two thousand years. The archetypal figure of this age is Jesus, whose birth came at its start. Negative aspects of this period have been delusions, addictions (especially to drugs and alcohol), and self-destruction. According to astrologers, the new Age of Aquarius represents technological advancements, originality, humanitarian values, truth, social reforms, and freedom from oppression. Its negative aspects include fanaticism, dogmatic impositions, and hypocrisy.

MATURITY IN EPOCH III

Another way of looking at this historical time is suggested by L. Robert Keck in his book *Sacred Eyes*. He states that we are entering Epoch III, the maturity phase of human existence. According to Keck, everything in existence was born of cosmic love billions of years ago. The human race began with Epoch I, which encompassed the birth and childhood of humanity. God gave humans a built-in desire for health and wholeness. In Epoch I, humankind developed physically; to do so, we stayed closely connected to nature and worshiped Mother Earth.

During Epoch II, the adolescence phase of humanity, we separated from nature and lost touch with our innate, natural power. We began projecting our sense of power onto things and other people. In suppressing our feminine side and trying to control others and nature, we lost our earthiness. This led to patriarchy, hierarchy, and a fascination with external power. Images of dominance became apparent as we worshiped a father-figure God.

These concepts, according to Keck, led us to view the world through scientific eyes instead of spiritual eyes. We separated Heaven and earth. In our adolescent stage, we created the need for intermediaries, such as priests and the church. The institution of the

church was necessary for the times because literacy was not prevalent. In order to promulgate its authority and belief system, the church justified all sorts of violence. Science, for its part, produced a left-brained preoccupation with rationalism and empiricism. This led to a preoccupation with masculinity, machines, and materialism.

In the 1960s, Keck contends, humanity entered into the era now drawing to a close—what he calls the Dark Night of the Soul. Our pathologies surfaced in racial violence and wars. Finally, we began to “see the light”; in the United States, this was reflected in the civil rights and women’s movements, followed by the peace and ecology movements. Continuing progress related to such developments is pushing humankind toward the maturity necessary for Epoch III.

The Dark Night has fundamentally been a spiritual crisis, says Keck. Spiritual maturation is needed. We must go forward. Mother-consciousness was appropriate for our childhood, and father-consciousness for our adolescence; now we need new images in order to attain spiritual wholeness.

If religions obsess over the past and the needs of Epoch II, Keck argues, they will remain out of touch with the deep spiritual renewal humanity now requires. If the protection of turf, power, and authority totally consume religious leaders, they will miss the call of the Spirit for a holistic society that is aware of feminism, ecology, ethnicity, and spiritual renewal.

Epoch III represents humanity’s coming of age—our adult maturity. It will be characterized by a fresh release of spiritual energy for spiritual development. We must return to the underground river of soul energy. Religions have traditionally been the wells from which humans accessed their soul power. But religions have become so preoccupied with their structure that they are out of touch with the wellsprings. If their focus remains on structure, policy, and dogma, the soul-river will dry up, and religions will die. Is there time to avoid this? I think so. Remember the Benedictine saying: “Respond immediately to whatever it is time for.” It is time to dig new wells.

NEW VALUES

Five major values posited by Keck in *Sacred Eyes* will help define our spiritual maturity in Epoch III. Let us consider three of them: holism and synergy, empowerment, and change.

Holism and synergy. Science has separated Heaven and earth, divine and human, matter and spirit, humans and the rest of nature, one group of humans and another. Science has not helped us with our spirituality. The metaphor of the machine has been used

to understand our “dis-spirited,” materialistic world, and the human brain has been compared to a computer. We need to discover a holistic environment in which to recover our bodies, health, sexuality, natural habitat, and sense of community. Feminism, ecology, and ethnicity proclaim the notion of recovery.

Synergy means that the whole is more than the sum of its parts and that no part can be fully understood apart from the whole. Synergy affirms the unique contribution and value of each part of the universe. If synergy is the framework, love is the catalyst.

Love—the essential power of wholeness and health, the essence of life itself—is basic to everything that is. Love is the cosmic quality of the Spirit that makes our universe holistic. It is humankind’s most fundamental energy. Love created all, is present in all, is the core of all. Forgiveness is the catalyst necessary to release and realize the power that is love. In this loving universe, we can be reunited with ourselves and every molecule of the universe. Love heals us and makes us whole.

Empowerment. Science tells us that we tap only a small portion of our talents and abilities and use only a fraction of our brain power. If we can pull together our body, mind, and spirit, we can become fully empowered.

Until now we have projected most of our power outward. By relying on machines and systems that humans have created to gain control, wealth, and prestige, we have disempowered ourselves. The goal of maturity in Epoch III challenges us to empower ourselves in order to begin attaining wholeness.

In the metaphor of the hologram, we live in a holistic universe. As individual parts of a whole, we contain the wisdom and power of the whole. By going within, we can access the essential power of the universe and empower our piece of it. In the holographic metaphor, love is a laser that illuminates the divine power within each of us. Once illuminated, our particular beam of the divine becomes manifest to others, radiating the divine image in which we were created.

But empowerment does not happen in isolation. We have to be in healthy and holy relationships—with other people, with nature, with all the realities of our lives. We have to start with ourselves and develop a healthy self-love in a holistic and empowering way in order to maintain and enhance our relational selves.

The four essential areas of empowerment are proactive empowerment, reactive empowerment, synergistic relationships, and courage.

Proactive empowerment requires that we develop strategies for taking responsibility for our own empowerment. Personal empowerment is essential for our maturation from adolescence to adulthood. We each have to discover our own uniqueness, our

version of the Spirit incarnate. We have to take back our own power—that part of creation which each of us has the capacity to empower. Each person is a piece of the spiritual hologram—a particular image of the divine soul. Each of us has a dark side that needs to be healed and integrated. We have to love our uniqueness, including our shadow side, and know that we are more than the sum of our individual parts.

Reactive empowerment gives us strategies that allow us to react to crises in ways that empower rather than disempower us. We must have the inner stance of victor rather than victim. With hope and determination, we will not attract people who will victimize or take advantage of us. With the civil rights slogan “We shall overcome” as our creed, we can trust in the power of the Spirit that dwells in us. This power will dispel all fear and doubt.

Synergistic relationships are powerful experiences of loving others in a mature way. One of our most difficult tasks is to love one another. If we are whole and healthy, we can enter into relationships that empower. In Epoch II we have tended to use power *over* others in relationships. As we approach Epoch III, we are moving toward the unity of the feminine and masculine within us in order to bring wholeness to our relationships, a sense of power *shared*.

Courage is necessary if we are to be empowered. Empowerment encompasses the ability to be vulnerable so that both people in a relationship may be empowered. In reaching out for another, we sometimes get burned or hurt, yet the process can lead to transformation. We must allow ourselves to move through the pain and toward the light.

Change. Everything in the universe evolves and transforms. Nothing is static; nothing remains the same. We are approaching a paradigmatic change. Change can be either positive or negative, constructive or destructive. The escalating pace of change provokes a sense of pressure and discomfort.

Health and wholeness will come only if we can become friendly with change. We must be ready to risk separating from the status quo. New opportunities will allow us to see reality in a different way and move to new levels of consciousness, thereby gaining new power that will allow us to empower. If we realize that we are loved by God, who is the most essential energy and presence in the universe, then love will help us understand change and not fear it. Love transcends any changes that take place in our lives.

As in any transitional time, some people will try to hold on to the past as we enter Epoch III. That will not work, however, because change is a constant in the universe. If we believe that love is at our core and that God continues to love us, we will not fear change.

Divine love pulls the universe together and empowers us to go forth in love.

CHALLENGE OF THE NEW

Epoch III is challenging us to bring forth a new earth and a new Heaven by gaining spiritual maturity. It means empowering ourselves to further our relationships with all of creation.

We are changing our image of the Creator. We switched from the Mother Goddess of Epoch I to the Father God of Epoch II. We now have to move to an image suitable for Epoch III. We developed our bodies in Epoch I, then our minds in Epoch II; now it is time to develop our spiritual selves. In Epoch III the Spirit of God will come upon us, and we will recognize that the Kingdom of God is within. It is our inner core, where our true self and the Spirit dwell.

In *Sacred Eyes*, Keck states that in Epoch II we said “God is love.” In Epoch III, he proposes, our new image should be “Love is God.” He explains:

It is Love that has created an evolutionary inwardness to the universe, growing us toward health and wholeness. It is Love that provides the allurements, the gravity, the attractional force that unites everything in a holistic universe. It is Love that heals our past and empowers our future. It is Love that affirms and liberates every person. And it is Love that can reunite the parts of us that we get separated and fractured, along with reconciling our estranged brothers and sisters on this planet, and can bring about a reunion and communion with Father Sky and Mother Earth. So Love just might be the best Epoch III name for God, if we can grow in our understanding of ontological love.

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Improving Your Expression of Anger

Janet Malone, C.N.D., Ed.D.

Be angry but sin not" (Eph. 4:26): Because anger is a taboo topic for many, living out this scriptural passage—which might seem to be "holy" but certainly not practical—may appear to have nothing to do with our "real" lives. This article, following up on my two previous HUMAN DEVELOPMENT articles on anger, focuses on what anger looks and sounds like when it is not "sinful." Looking at different anger responses in terms of communication, it offers concrete suggestions on how to express anger constructively and nonviolently.

WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?

SPEAKER: There are about five thousand languages on earth, and we can't find one we both understand!

LISTENER: What in the world are you talking about?

How often the foregoing scenario is played out in one's life! Because the intention is in the speaker but the meaning of what he or she has said is in the listener, the challenges of communication are daunting at times.

Communication—a word rooted in the Latin *communicare*, possibly derived from *com* + *unus* (union)—refers to a dynamic process of giving and sharing meaning, verbally and/or nonverbally. The main pur-

pose of communication is to share meaning related to one's observations, thoughts, feelings, and needs.

Because of socialization and sex-role differences, which emphasize the seemingly mutually exclusive goals of involvement and independence, much of our communication is indirect—the result of a tension between staying separate (protecting oneself) and being connected (sharing oneself).

Deborah Tannen's research highlights the tendency of men to be more direct in their communication than women, who tend to be more indirect—to the point that male and female communication styles could be considered two different cultures.

Indirect communication can result in misunderstandings in which what is said is not what is meant or not what is heard—as exemplified by the humorous comment, "I know you believe that you understand what you think I said, but I am not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant." Good communication necessitates directness. The challenge is to learn how to be direct without being offensive or violent or causing the other to lose face.

VERBAL AND NONVERBAL COMPONENTS

Most communication has verbal and nonverbal components. The verbal (linguistic) component is

the message—the what, or content, of one’s communication. The message is conveyed through choice of words (vocabulary), how those words are strung together (syntax), and semantics (meaning). The nonverbal (paralinguistic) component is the metamesage—the how of one’s communication. The metamesage is transmitted through body posture, facial expression, eye contact, and nuances of voice (volume, pitch, rate, timbre).

Peter Waxer, writing in the book *Nonverbal Behavior* (edited by Aaron Wolfgang), claims that in North American culture, communication is 7 percent verbal and 93 percent nonverbal. No matter the percentages, many would agree that the nonverbal—the emotional component—is the crux of communication. Few would take the strictly objectivist viewpoint that only the verbal component counts and the nonverbal is to be discredited. Thus, it is paramount to ensure that there is congruence or consonance between the verbal and nonverbal components of communication. Otherwise, a mixed message results—and when that happens, many people unconsciously choose to receive the nonverbal message. It is critical to know what one’s nonverbal communication looks like and how it affects others. Being unaware of giving mixed messages compromises directness and good communication.

SILENCE AND COMMUNICATION

In a culture that places great importance on the verbal, silence can be seen as a vacuum that must be filled with sound bites. Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk, referred to silence as the mother of communication, an integral part of its ebb and flow. That kind of silence, necessary in a world that is increasingly noise-polluted, is quite distinct from what is commonly known as the silent treatment—a passive-aggressive behavior in which silence is used to punish, control, and manipulate.

MODELS OF COMMUNICATION

Many people are familiar with the linear, mechanistic model of communication. It is based on the premise that there is one objective (correct) reality; therefore, a good communicator chooses the precise and correct words to convey that reality. This model assumes that the sender of the message must choose the appropriate words to convey the objective reality, and the receiver of the message must interpret those words as the sender meant them to be understood. This model tends to encourage one-way communication because it assumes that there is only one

meaning for a verbal communication, and thus only one interpretation.

The circular model of communication, on the other hand, is based on the constructivist worldview, which postulates that reality is constructed as it is experienced. From this perspective, communication is a dynamic process in which the realities of both speaker and listener are interfaced and meaning is shared. In other words, communication is a coordinated management of meaning.

FOUR ANGER RESPONSE STYLES

I have developed a survey, based on what I perceive to be the four main communication styles, for use in my anger management workshops. In completing the survey, each participant explores his or her most common anger response style: passive, aggressive, passive-aggressive, or assertive. My goal is not to determine whether the participants have completed the survey in a particular way. The point of the survey is to help them examine how they see themselves at this given moment. Interestingly, some participants have told me that they have used the survey with their counselors and therapists; some have asked close friends to complete the survey about them in order to get feedback on how others see them.

Most people use a combination of all four communication styles, but it helps to know what anger response style one uses most frequently and whether another style prevails under extreme conditions. If there is a “tie” in the scoring of the survey, it is for the participants to determine which style comes automatically and which may be used as a backup.

For the most part, we learn our anger response styles from significant others during our formative years. Unfortunately, in a lot of cases, those styles don’t work in any constructive way in the here and now. If they do work, it may be at another’s expense. For instance, one person may lose face because of the violent and nonconstructive approach of another.

Using the results of the survey, workshop participants, through roleplay and other learning activities, examine the words and actions of each of the four anger response styles to assess where they are and where they want to be. This is an opportunity for them to become more self-aware and more conscious of how they respond in situations involving conflict and anger.

Only when one can name what is happening in a self-reflective way can change begin to occur. The goal—a lifelong process—is to move to an assertive anger response style and away from the other three

styles, which are unhealthy and at times violent to oneself and others.

Passive anger response style. People with a passive communication style are concerned about being liked and accepted; they fear rejection. Thus, such individuals may feel powerless, controlled, victimized, and angry but will hide those feelings because it is neither “nice” nor acceptable to be angry. They have difficulty feeling or thinking for themselves because being accepted by others is paramount. Such people try to sense what others feel and think in order to agree with them. Being “meek” and “humble” and not saying what they think robs these individuals of a basic integrity and authenticity. Because their needs are not met, their interactions with others are often “You win, I lose” propositions.

Those with a passive anger response style, driven by their fear of rejection, sound tentative because they want to please at all costs. Their eye contact may be limited, their body posture may slump, and they may move at a slow, foot-dragging pace. They may speak softly or in an expressionless monotone and may mumble or talk to themselves. Their statements may frequently end with such phrases as “Isn’t that right?” or “Don’t you agree?” or “I’m not sure” or “What do you think?”

Aggressive anger response style. People with an aggressive anger response style are expressing resentment over past hurts that have festered over the years. They often have a “chip-on-the-shoulder” stance. Confrontational and offensive, the aggressive style focuses on getting one’s needs met at others’ expense, with an attitude of “I win, you lose.” Those who use this approach are often covertly, if not overtly, violent and nonconstructive in their efforts to control and manipulate. Their voices are loud, high-pitched, and shrill (they usually yell); the rate of their speech may be fast or slow and measured. Blaming statements, sarcasm, and caustic humor are the order of the day (“You make me so angry.” “Oh, why don’t you keep quiet and give your gums a rest.” “You are such a loser.”). Verbal and psychological abuse are closely linked with physical abuse: shouting can quickly turn to pushing, slapping, punching, and breaking and throwing things. Indeed, as the adage goes, violence begets violence.

Passive-aggressive anger response style. People with a passive-aggressive anger response style are operating out of a combination of frustration, fear, and desire for revenge. Feeling fed up or powerless, those who use this style combine aspects of both the passive and aggressive anger response styles. Al-

though they might want to deal with their frustrations in an aggressive way, they are afraid of the consequences. Thus, the aggression is combined with a passive style, with an eye toward revenge (“I will get you, and you will know not the day or the hour.” “I will keep a record of every hurt, real or imagined, and I will even the score.”). The underlying attitude is “I lose, and you do too.” People with the passive-aggressive approach make cynical, negative, and over-generalized comments (“So, we’re having another of our famous do-nothing meetings, are we?” “Everyone around here is taking it pretty easy; thank God some of us are responsible.” “No one is ever around; nobody ever tells me what is going on.”). Their nonverbal behavior is very “loud.”

Sabotage is common in this anger response style—“forgetting” one’s promised commitments, saying yes but acting “no,” not showing up, coming late, leaving early, and otherwise disrupting events in subtle ways.

Practitioners of this style may use the silent treatment, whereby one “punishes” another person by not talking to him or her. This violent and nonconstructive behavior can go on for long periods of time in a group, community, or work situation. From the perspective of systems theory, it has deleterious effects on the whole group. In “A Threat to Christian Communities” (HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, Winter 1984), Robert Wicks has noted that the silent treatment is the style used all too frequently by both women and men religious.

Assertive anger response style. People with an assertive anger response style possess a sense of personal well-being and high self-esteem. Their communication is direct, reflecting not only their openness to having their own needs met but also their respect for others. Individuals with this style try to ensure congruence between the verbal and nonverbal aspects of their communication. The prevailing attitude is “I win, and you win too.” Coming from a centered place within a person’s being, the assertive style is characterized by “I” statements that convey personal needs, thoughts, observations, and feelings in a dialogic way. People who use this style of anger response attempt to coordinate the management of different meanings while remaining aware of the personal values, biases, prejudices, stereotypes, and past hurts that factor in.

Most readers are probably familiar with “I” statements. I would like to elaborate on these by describing two formats: one for use in personal contexts when there is enough safety to share one’s feelings (this is the type of “I” statement often noted in the literature) and one I’ve developed for use in a professional context or in less “safe” personal situations when an assertive anger response style is still desirable.

The personal "I" statement, which has four aspects, is usually stated in the following way: "I felt angry [specific emotion] when you interrupted me three times as I was giving my report [specific, concrete words/actions of the other] because I felt that what I was saying wasn't important [effect on me]; what I'd appreciate is being able to finish my summary, and then I'd be happy to entertain your questions or comments [concrete, specific wish]."

The professional "I" statement, which has three aspects, conveys the speaker's observations, thoughts, and needs. These are three of the four main purposes of communication. The speaker's feelings are omitted from this version of the "I" statement for reasons that may include fear of reprisal or lack of mutuality, safety, or security. This format might be used by a woman who has not gotten a job for which she has applied. In reflecting on her hurt and anger over not obtaining a position for which she was obviously qualified, she might wonder whether sexism or racism was involved. An assertive anger response style helps her stay self-empowered and, at the same time, respectful of the other. Her "I" statement might be worded as follows: "I have noticed that John Doe got the job I applied for [specific, concrete observation]. I think I have the skills and qualifications for the job [personal thoughts on the issue, without judgments]. I would appreciate your going over my interview results with me to help me see what made the difference in your choice [concrete, specific wish or need]."

Using this assertive style to communicate directly about one's needs and wishes does not guarantee that the other person will comply. One does not have control over the behavior of others. Part of an assertive anger response style is staying self-empowered while recognizing that in any interaction with others, the final outcome is beyond one's control.

The assertive anger response style ensures that the other person is respected in a coordinated management of meaning from both perspectives. As noted in my article "Forgive But Don't Forget" (HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, Summer 1994), respecting the other person does not mean condoning what he or she has said or done. It does mean safeguarding against obvious communication barriers such as blaming, mind-reading, judging, and making unfounded assumptions about the other person.

A LIFELONG PROCESS

Learning to communicate in ways that are open, direct, and assertive is a lifelong process that entails building an awareness of the verbal and nonverbal components of communication. It also involves a recognition of the variations in socialization that lead people to use different combinations of the passive, aggressive, and passive-aggressive communication styles as frequently as, if not more than, the assertive style. Adopting an assertive anger response style requires emphasis on one's own emotions, needs, thoughts, and observations, as well as respect for others. A lived, ongoing experience of the circular model of communication—that is, the mutual cocreation of reality in a coordinated management of meaning—is the goal of true communication.

Both daily prayer and daily efforts are needed in order to cultivate a healthy anger response style. Change and conversion are gradual. Being self-empowered and assertive is certainly an ongoing challenge. Yet it is indeed possible to "be angry but sin not."

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Stepping Up

James Torrens, S.J.

The Seven Sieves

Some poor guy is stepping high,
the duke of his own dream.
Some professor, some hotshot
is sizzling with esteem.

Anyold woman's narrowed eyes
go peering through the fence.
How green the grassy neighbors are,
how quick she'd drive them hence.

Some poor guy will shower sparks
if a shoe crunch his toes.
Stilettoes leap to speak for him
and subway glares are blows.

Anyold woman saves and saves,
she's loading up her ark—
so braceleted and thick with furs,
you think it could embark?!

Some poor guy picks anyold tree
and spreads out in the shade;
his weeds are thriving in the sun
for someone else's spade.

Anyold woman likes pure gin
to keep her dreams afloat.
She chooses candied company
and rides the gravy boat.

Some poor guy has heard and dreamed
what any young chick will do;
he wrestles for her brief consent,
and finds her eager to.

These seven fools in seven skins
go graceless as a sieve;
they soon will mount the seven steps,
what they confess forgive.

From *Sign of Life*, James Torrens, S.J., 1970.

I wrote the appended poem several decades ago, under the influence of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and perhaps that of *The Faerie Queene* by the Elizabethan poet Edmund Spenser. Both writers dwell on the seven capital sins—a favorite *topos*, or literary topic, of those centuries. Even today, the movie *Seven*, fitting a murder to each of those categories, illustrates their durability.

Dante Alighieri, however, composing his otherworld fiction between 1302 and 1321, shows us nothing sensational or titillating in the capital sins. He presents them in a context of expiation; he uses them to structure the middle section of his *commedia*, which he calls "Purgatory." In the title of his famous autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, Thomas Merton evokes Dante's purgatorial geography while summing up his own climb to conversion.

Dante, writing his own autobiography full of fiction and fact, is carried up during a dream to the portals of purgatory, and he passes through by taking part in an allegory of the sacrament of confession. Then, with his shadowy guide, Virgil, he squeezes upward through a wedge of rock, meant to remind us how narrow is the entrance to salvation—the needle's eye that a camel can pass through quicker than a rich man.

On the first and lowest terrace, where the holy souls expiate their pride, Dante first of all views some marble friezes that illustrate humility—an incident from Greco-Roman history, one from the Hebrew scriptures, and one from the life of the Virgin Mary.

Then he finds people crushed under large stones that they have to carry on their backs, with their pretensions—in other words, they are flattened to earth. He gets the story of three whom he knows. Afterward, the travelers find mythical and scriptural incidents of pride incised into the ground on which they are walking. These three elements—the encounters plus the positive and negative examples—occur on each of the seven levels.

On the second terrace, the envious bunch up, leaning on one another, with their eyes stitched shut. Dante was a master of *contrapasso*, or making the punishment fit the crime. On terrace three, the wrathful pick their way through a rolling cloud of black smoke. On terrace four, the slothful are kept on the run, crying out, “Faster, faster, not to lose time for too little love” (18:103–4). The fifth terrace groups the avaricious and the wastrels—all of them forced to lie face-down on the ground, for they had let themselves be absorbed in earthly possessions. In Dante’s view, avarice was the principal sin of churchmen, so it is no surprise to find there Pope Adrian V, who reigned for thirty-eight days in Dante’s childhood. Terrace six, displaying “a tree with fruit fragrant and good,” (22:131–2), also contains the emaciated souls of the gluttonous, who are forbidden to taste of it. (How can a soul taste? Read Dante.) Finally, at the topmost cornice, the lustful move through a sheet of flames, singing out to God’s mercy.

Dante Alighieri, writing in the early 1300s, made the most of what the church had just defined at the Council of Lyons, in 1274, about purgatory. The medieval scholar Jacques Le Goff, in *The Birth of Purgatory* (English translation, 1984), identifies the twelfth century as the time in which this doctrine and popular devotion crystallized. Distinction between mortal and venial sin had been clarified, and auricular confession had just been introduced. The abbey of Cluny began commemorating the dead on November 2. Gratian, codifying canon law, gave priority to the Eucharistic sacrifice in helping the holy souls, and also called for the prayers of those near and dear to them. *St. Patrick’s Purgatory*—the account of a knight who claimed to have visited the subsurface area of expiation, under an island in Lough Derg, Ireland—topped the visionary literature spreading through Europe.

Theologians in those days—Saint Bernard, the school of Saint Victor, Alexander of Hales, Saint Albert, and Saint Thomas Aquinas—laid down the essentials about purgatory, but they worried about its weak scriptural base and popular exaggerations. The church was making explicit—against Albigensians, against the Greek Orthodox, and later against Luther—this view of the afterlife. Prior to the final judgment, those who have gone to God with venial

What does Dante’s purgatory, or our communion with the holy souls, have to teach us here and now?

sins unconfessed, or mortal sins unatoned for, will be subject to the fire that, according to Saint Paul, consumes what we build in wood, hay, or straw on the foundation of Christ (1 Cor. 3:12–13).

As Le Goff tells us, *The Divine Comedy* helped clarify Catholic thought and imagination. Debate had raged over who presides over the pains of purgatory—devils or angels. Angels, definitely, said Dante. At every chance, he struck a hopeful note, whether with the singing of church hymns (Gregorian favorites like *Salve Regina* and the *Te Deum*), the brilliant courtesy of the angels, or the peacefulness of the sufferers. The drift of Dante’s age was toward infernalizing purgatory, making it a temporary hell, but he did not go along with that.

In a literal and vivid age, people speculated about the whereabouts of purgatory. Most thought it was under the earth, though distinct from hell and above it. Many considered volcanoes, such as Mount Etna, to be the entrance. Dante took the hint of the mountain but envisioned a peaceful summit. He located the earthly paradise there—the place of lost innocence that we attain only after a hard climb.

Dante struck one traditional note about purgatory. At every level, souls throng about, asking the pilgrim to remind such and such a relative on earth to please start praying for them. But Dante did exercise a poet’s license with the ante-purgatory he invented—a waiting area below the gate of purgatory proper, on the lower flank of the mountain. Those who delayed repentance until the brink of death have to wait there a number of years just to get in, unless some intercessor speeds up their cause.

Dante wants to bring home the purgatorial truth to earthly readers, whom he often addresses. When

about to describe two angels dressed in green, driving off a serpent from the Valley of the Negligent Princes, he alerts us to the allegory. "Reader," he says, "sharpen your eye to the truth" (8:19–21). Approaching the torments of the proud, he instructs us, "Do not turn from your intention to repent" just because of torments you are about to see (10:107).

To his patron Can Grande della Scala of Verona, Dante gave a lesson about how to read his text. It can be taken literally, he wrote, in which case it is purely and simply about the state of souls after death receiving what they have merited—or it can be taken allegorically. In that case it will be understood as pointing to what here and now, on earth, a given person deserves as reward or punishment for how he or she is acting. The allegorical was paramount in his intentions, we know. The otherworld journey of the pilgrim had the stated purpose of changing his conduct and attitude upon his return.

What does Dante's purgatory, or our communion with the holy souls, have to teach us here and now? The first person to open this line of inquiry, Saint Augustine, was also the very first to begin discussing the purgatorial state. Augustine ventured the reflection that the purgatorial fire can touch us here in this life, and that it should. This too is what T. S. Eliot said, in a cryptic way, in *Four Quartets*: "The only hope, or else despair / lies in the choice of pyre or pyre— / to be redeemed from fire by fire" (from "Little Gidding").

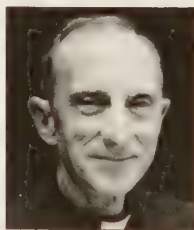
Virgil, Dante's guide, has something crucial to tell Cato, the first attendant on Mount Purgatory, about the pilgrim: "He goes seeking liberty, so dear is it to him" (1:71). Dante, identifying with the sufferers stage by stage, undergoes a purification, a freeing of the impulses that have had him under their control. He acknowledges needing most to be liberated from pride and from lust. He will suffer a little for envy, but not much, he says (who is he to envy, being Dante?!). At the summit of Mount Purgatory, where Virgil finds Dante a mature and responsible believer at last, his mentor tells him: "Your will is upright, free and

whole, . . . / lord of yourself I crown and mitre you" (27:140, 142).

Our own times have much to teach us about the pain of recovery, as from alcoholism and addiction, from tendencies to violence or sexual disorders. Our times are very ready with the label of "illness" for all these conditions, which indeed do reduce culpability through the clouding of mind and heart. But we do not cease to be human, to have some say, and to be responsible in some measure. As we heal from hurtful conditions—and, indeed, as we suffer the consequences of angry outbursts, or laziness, or prideful isolation—it helps us, I think, to accept some sense of purgatory happening to us.

"Blessed are the pure of heart," says the beatitude. What does "purity of heart" mean? I take it to mean the stilling of self-interest and of competitiveness, of greediness and unresting appetite, and of fearfulness. I take it to mean what the spiritual writers call "detachment" and what Ignatius Loyola called "indifference." This is rarely achieved without some pain or, as Dante puts it, without untwisting the twist of our loves.

Each of us has a lot to pass through. Face it: life often is purgatorial, given such conditions as ill health; unpleasant work; difficult superiors, bosses, or partners—given also our disappointments, frustrations, perplexities, losses. Amidst all our prayer for deliverance or healing comes that most essential of all prayers, the one to the Holy Spirit. Lead us further and further, please—up whatever mountain, of our own making or not—into God's life.



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Joy in Times of Failure

Francis J. Buckley, S.J., S.T.D.

There is a popular saying attributed to football coach Vince Lombardi: "Winning isn't everything. It's the only thing." My own father used to tell me, "Never say *can't*." Father Christopher Mooney, S.J., researching for an article, looked at the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* and found "Failure: see Success." Americans idolize success and deny failure or blot it from consciousness.

This attitude is not confined to Americans. In the playoffs of the 1994 World Cup, the soccer ball ricocheted off star Colombian player Andres Escobar into his own net, giving a point to the United States team. When the Colombian star returned home, he was killed by angry fans, who could not accept that mistakes happen.

"Superiors never make mistakes," a Jesuit superior assured me one day.

"Sure," I said. "I can understand that. 'God writes straight with crooked lines.' God's providence allows people to make what humanly seems to be an error, but this is part of a bigger plan."

"No," replied the superior. "Superiors never make mistakes of any kind."

I realized then that I was dealing with someone from another planet, totally out of touch with reality. Especially since he was notorious among the Jesuits for the whopping blunders he had made!

Failure is inevitable—little failures and big failures. Alexander Pope was right when he wrote, "To err is human." We all experience:

Physical failure. Commercials for eyeglasses, hearing aids, and aspirin remind us that we all run the risk of weakness and sickness.

Memory failure. How often we forget a name or an anniversary!

Intellectual failure. School systems are built and books become best-sellers because we do not understand mathematical or social or economic problems; foreign languages; a parent or child or spouse or friend; a human situation; or even a game.

Emotional failure. We cannot control our anger, disgust, depression, or fears.

Social failure. Not everyone loves us, even though we brush our teeth, comb our hair, dress appropriately, and use deodorant.

Political failure. Even talented and well-intentioned politicians discover that they cannot persuade everyone to do things their way.

Economic failure. We cannot earn all we want or buy all we want or sell all we want.

CAUSES OF FAILURE

What lies behind all our failures? Sometimes they are our own fault, the consequences of our sins. Adam and Eve decided to ignore God's warnings, ate the forbidden fruit, felt guilty, tried to hide, shifted the blame, and eventually found that the whole world turned against them for turning against God. As Eve cradled the dead Abel in her arms, it was small comfort to know that Cain would be exiled far from her and Adam. It did not help to say, "Like father, like son." King David lusted for Bathsheba; killed her husband, Uriah; and lived to see his own son Absalom kill his brother, revolt against David, and commit incest publicly with David's wives.

Sometimes failures are not our own fault but result from the sins of others. The Bible portrays Abel and Uriah as the innocent victims of Cain and David. The recent histories of Rwanda, Bosnia, Cambodia, Korea, Haiti, and Guatemala are filled with stories of innocent victims of others' greed for power and pleasure and wealth.

Sometimes failures involve no moral fault at all. Football, baseball, tennis, and soccer, as well as checkers and chess, all demand both winners and losers. People of different cultures or genders may fail to communicate because they speak different languages or have different assumptions and expectations. Not everyone agrees with "no-fault" insurance or "no-fault" divorce, but it is outrageous to blame everyone who breaks a leg or forgets a telephone number.

RESULTS OF FAILURE

Since every failure is a "little death" in which our plans fall apart or our self-esteem is bruised, it is not surprising that many people deal with failure the way that Elisabeth Kübler-Ross found people dealing with death. Some deny it: "This can't be happening to me." Some try bargaining: "Maybe if I try another approach . . ." Some get angry: "It's just not fair." Some are depressed: "What have I done to deserve this?" Such reactions to failure are psychologically to be expected.

The Hebrew psalms run the gamut of emotions in the face of failure: anger, despair, fear, hope, repentance, humility, patience. Psalm 107 might be dubbed "The Losers' Psalm." Some of these people are guiltless, and some are guilty, but all are in sore straits. From their distress Yahweh rescues them all.

Some "were wandering astray in the desert, . . .
They were hungry and thirsty. . . ."

Others, "Fettered in misery and chains,
for defying the orders of Yahweh,
for scorning the plan of the Most High—
he subdued their spirit by hard labor. . . ."

Others are "Fools for their rebellious ways,
wretched because of their sins,
finding all food repugnant,
brought close to the gates of death. . . ."

A storm overtakes innocent "voyagers on the sea in ships. . . .
Up to the sky, then down to the depths!
Their stomachs were turned to water;
they staggered and reeled like drunkards,
and all their skill went under."

All of these failures "cried out to Yahweh in their distress;
he rescued them from their plight. . . .
Let them thank Yahweh for his faithful love. . . ."

The just man expresses his trust in God's justice. Even as the sinner whets his sword, draws his bow, and prepares to strike,

he is making ready instruments of death for himself
and tipping his arrows with fire;
look at him: pregnant with malice,
conceiving spite, he gives birth to treachery.
He digs a trap, scoops it out,
but he falls into the snare he has made himself.
His spite recoils on his own head,
his brutality falls back on his own skull. (7:12-16)

By way of contrast, a repentant sinner prays to God:

My sin has left no health in my bones. . . .
I have stinking, festering wounds,
thanks to my own folly. . . .
Friends and companions shun my disease,
even the dearest of them keep their distance. . . .
Never let them gloat over me,
do not let them take advantage of me. . . . (38:3, 5, 11, 16)

On the cross, the innocent but disgraced Jesus utters the first line of Psalm 22:

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? . . .
I am a worm, not a man,
scorn of mankind, contempt of the people;
all who see me jeer at me,
they sneer and wag their heads. (22:1, 6-7)

Before dying, Jesus borrows from another psalm to express his trust:

In you, Yahweh, I have taken refuge,
let me never be put to shame. . . .
Into your hands I commit my spirit. (31:1, 5)

JESUS' FAILURE

The failure of Jesus is worth exploring in some detail. One of the most painful of his torments as he hung upon the cross was the mockery of his enemies. The people who passed by attributed his miracles to trickery and deceit, since now he seemed to have no power to defend himself. How could God allow the high priests and the scribes to mock him, if Jesus were the great prophet he claimed to be? He must be a hoax. They shook their heads in contempt.

The soldiers joined in the mockery, shouting, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." One of the robbers scorned him: "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." They made fun of his miracles of mercy, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself." They mocked him as a false Messiah: "If he be the Messiah, let him come down from the cross and we will believe in him." They mocked his holiness and his trust in God: "He trusted in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

Again and again, the enemies of Jesus around the cross echoed the words of the Book of Wisdom, written so long before:

Let us lie in wait for the just man,
for he opposes our doings and reproaches us with our
transgressions of the law
and charges us with sins against what we have been
taught.
He professes to have knowledge of God, and calls him-
self the Son of God.
We have found him a reproof for our thoughts. He is
wearisome for us even to behold,
for his life is not like other men's; his ways are very
different.
He considers us triflers and avoids our ways as unclean;
he calls the end of the upright happy, and boasts that God
is his Father.
Let us see whether his words be true, and what will hap-
pen at his departure,
for if he be the Son of God, he will help him,
and save him from the hands of his enemies.
Let us test him with insults and torture
so that we may learn his meekness and try his patience.
Let us condemn him to a shameful death,
for he will be watched over, from what he says.
So they reasoned, but they went astray,
for their malice blinded them, and they did not know
God's secrets. (2:12-21)

Jesus hangs in midair, rejected by earth, not yet received by heaven. The last tie that binds him to earth is severed. His garments are divided; the very mother who bore him is given away. Almost all have forsaken him. Judas has betrayed him for thirty pieces of silver

and refused his mercy by taking his own life. The apostles have fled out of fear of a mob that fell helpless to the ground in the Garden. Peter has denied him because of the taunts of a portress. The leaders of Israel, his own people—his chosen, well-beloved people—have turned their backs on him because they hope to receive greater comfort, security, and honor from Caesar. The little circle of faithful friends before his eyes can do nothing but increase his pain by their sorrow, helplessness, and grief. His body is aching. He seems totally cut off from divine consolation.

And now, in the midst of this desolation, his enemies suggest that his Father does not love him, that God has added his rejection to that of men. "He trusted in God," they say. "Let God deliver him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

Jesus opens his lips in reply. Painfully, agonizingly, he utters the first words of the 22nd Psalm—the psalm written to describe this day and its miseries, a psalm of hope and confidence, a psalm that predicts not only the passion but also the glorious victory that will follow. He says, "My God, why have you abandoned me?"

Of Jesus' last words, Matthew and Mark have only these. We can get so distracted by the word *abandoned* that we miss the question and its answer, framed in prayer. Some theologians, carried away by rhetoric, have said that Jesus suffered the pains of hell. No, Jesus never suffered the pains of hell, which are reserved for those who have abandoned God. On the cross, it is not God who has been abandoned, but Jesus. His question—"Why?"—is an act of faith, of trust that God has some purpose in all this, even though the reason is not obvious.

The answer to Jesus' question is that God is letting him experience the full onslaught of sin, so that by seeing it, we sinners can get some insight into sin's horror. Why does God do this? Not because God the Father has stopped loving Jesus. God has always loved his Son. He never stopped. But God also loves us and respects our freedom. God will not force us to stop sinning, but he will appeal to our hearts. He will reveal to us the depths of his love. No one can have greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends—but Jesus laid down his life for those whom he loves but who refuse to love him and one another.

Still, this answer does not diminish the real pain Jesus experienced. In some sense Jesus was abandoned to his enemies, even though his Father was always with him. He felt abandoned, and he was abandoned by almost all those he had loved and served. His enemies must have smiled in triumph. Yahweh seemed to have no use for him. Think of the effect on the people standing nearby—Mary, the other women, John. Truly, Jesus seemed a failure. In the midst of

this failure, Jesus raised his voice and said, "It is finished."

How different are God's judgments from the world's! The world would consider Jesus' work sadly incomplete and unfinished—this life of thirty years of labor and a few months of preaching and this ignominious death on the cross. Was ever failure so seemingly complete? Yet Jesus judged that his work was finished.

What is finished? First, his work of love is complete. At the incarnation, according to Saint Paul, Jesus had emptied himself of the glory of his divinity. Now he has emptied himself of his blood. He has given us his flesh as food, his blood as drink. He has even given away his mother.

Second, the prophecies made about him have been fulfilled, as in Psalms 22, 69, and 40 and Isaiah 40–55.

Third, his sacrifice has been completed. At the Last Supper, he had offered his life as a bloody sacrifice to seal the New Covenant between God and us. He himself is the Lamb of God, offered for sin on the altar of the cross. He has purchased by his blood the redemption of the whole human family. Peter, in his first letter, says, "The price of your ransom . . . was paid, not in anything perishable like silver and gold, but in the precious blood of a blameless and spotless lamb, Christ" (1:18–19). Jesus is the *go'el*, the family member responsible for getting the rest of his family out of trouble. He has done this not by staging a surprise raid as Abraham did to rescue his nephew Lot, not by enduring exile and prison as Joseph did to rescue his brothers who had sold him into slavery, but by undergoing death itself in order to reveal to us the nature of sin and the extent of his love for us.

Finally, he has planted the tiny mustard seed of the church, and he will water it with the blood and water that will flow from his pierced side.

JOY IN THE MIDST OF FAILURE

Bitterness, anger, and depression are normal, natural reactions to disaster. What is not to be expected is joy in the face of failure. But the death and resurrection of Jesus have reversed human values. Paul writes,

It is about my weaknesses that I am happiest of all to boast, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me; and that is why I am glad of weaknesses, insults, constraints, persecutions, and distress for Christ's sake. For it is when I am weak that I am strong. (2 Cor. 12:9–10)

We are subjected to every kind of hardship, but never distressed; we see no way out, but we never despair; we are pursued but never cut off; knocked down, but still

have some life in us; always we carry with us in our body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus, too, may be visible in our body. Indeed, while we are still alive, we are continually being handed over to death, for the sake of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus, too, may be visible in our mortal flesh. . . . He who raised up the Lord Jesus will raise us up with Jesus in our turn, and bring us to himself. . . . That is why we do not waver; indeed, though this outer human nature of ours may be falling into decay, at the same time our inner human nature is renewed day by day. The temporary, light burden of our hardships is earning us for ever an utterly incomparable, eternal weight of glory, since what we aim for is not visible but invisible. Visible things are transitory, but invisible things eternal. (2 Cor. 4:8–11, 14, 16–18)

We prove ourselves authentic servants of God; by resolute perseverance in times of hardships, difficulties and distress; when we are flogged or sent to prison or mobbed; laboring, sleepless, starving; . . . in times of honor or disgrace, blame or praise; taken for impostors and yet we are genuine; . . . dying, and yet here we are, alive; scourged but not executed; in pain, yet always full of joy; poor, and yet making many people rich; having nothing, yet owning everything. (2 Cor. 6:4–10)

In all our hardship, I am filled with encouragement and overflowing with joy. (2 Cor. 7:4)

This attitude to suffering is not unique to Paul. In his letter, James writes, "Consider it a great joy when trials of many kinds come upon you, for you well know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance, and perseverance must complete its work so that you will become fully developed, complete, not deficient in any way" (1:2–4). This echoes what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven; this is how they persecuted the prophets before you" (Matt. 5:11–12). And in the letter to the Hebrews we read, "For the sake of the joy which lay ahead of him, he endured the cross, disregarding the shame of it, and has taken his seat at the right of God's throne" (12:2).

What lies behind this welcoming of failure, even if it is painful? Obviously, we ought not welcome the sin in ourselves or others that leads to failure. We should not even welcome the pain of failure in some masochistic way. But we can welcome failure as a learning experience.

If we have sinned, failure can alert us to our sin so that we can repent, ask forgiveness, and be purified. Even if we have not sinned, we can learn obedience, like Jesus, who "learned obedience through suffering" (Heb. 5:8). Only by facing adversity do we learn

patience and trust. We learn humility, recognizing our limits. We learn courage. We learn the depth of our own love, for no one can have greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends (John 15:13). We learn God's love as we experience his presence, power, and support. We learn that God does not love us because we succeed. God loved us when we were sinners, and God continued to love Jesus, who died in failure. God loves us because of who we are—his creatures and adopted children—and God rejoices in our saying yes to him, no matter what.

One of the ways my students have surprised me is that they find God in failure more than in success or beauty. The death of a parent or relative, the breakup of a love affair, the loss of a game or a job are for them windows of discovery. They realize that they are not self-sufficient, not in control of life, so they look beyond themselves. They learn a lot from failure.

If we experience failure in this life, then we are carrying the cross after Jesus, walking in his footsteps (Mark 8:34). Suffering thus becomes a sign that we are going in the right direction. Failure can have redemptive value, especially if endured as part of the apostolate. "It makes me happy to be suffering for you now, and in my own body to make up all the hardships that still have to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the Church" (Col. 1:24).

Just as the failure of Jesus on the cross led to the glory of the resurrection, our failure too can lead to glory. Peter writes, "Do not be taken aback at the testing by fire which is taking place among you, as though something strange were happening to you; but insofar as you share in the sufferings of Christ, be glad, so that you may enjoy a much greater gladness when his glory is revealed" (1 Pet. 4:12–13).

FAILURE IN HEAVEN

There will even be failure in heaven. How so? Not failure due to sin, but failure due to human limits. We shall experience puzzlement at problems, for we shall remain human, not understanding all the conclusions in the premises, as if we were angels. This is actually a benefit, for there will still be room for the delight of discovery and of sharing discoveries with others.

In heaven we shall be able to play games and lose. Since this type of failure is not sinful and does not threaten our union with God, we shall see it in context and not be threatened or disheartened. To have failed is not to be a failure.

In heaven there will be everything human not incompatible with total union with God, so there will be room for trial and error, learning, even growth in virtue. We can get a glimpse of this right now from computers. They do not blame us for our mistakes. They readily allow us to correct errors and banish them to electronic limbo. Failure is not totally evil; it can lead to success.

There was much wisdom in that index entry, "Failure: see Success"—probably more than the editor realized. It is one of the paradoxical secrets of Christian life.



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A Meditation on Wholeness

Julie McCole, O.S.F.

Most traditional approaches to interpreting the familiar story of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38–42) have emphasized the contrast between the two women, with Martha embodying the active life and Mary the contemplative life. As I read and pray with that gospel in an attempt to live as it calls me to, I have discovered that it challenges me—not to allow either my Martha or my Mary side to dominate, but to find ways to integrate the giftedness that each of these disciples of Jesus offers.

The struggle to respond to this invitation toward integration and balance in my life gave birth to these reflections. Perhaps they will speak to those, like myself, whose ministry serves the contemplative Mary in others but who find themselves acting and feeling like the harried Martha.

In order to present a more complete portrait of these gospel women, I will reflect not only on Luke's story but also on John's two significant accounts of Martha and Mary, in the stories of the raising of Lazarus (John 11:1–44) and the anointing at Bethany (John 12:1–11). These accounts speak to me not only of Martha and Mary's friendship with Jesus but also of the relationship each of us has with Jesus and how that relationship leads us to embrace a holistic approach to life.

At the beginning of the story in Luke, we find Martha and Mary welcoming Jesus into their home. These women were sisters with very different personalities. Likewise, the ways they chose to make Jesus feel at home differed greatly. Reread this familiar story and try to get in touch with the similarities and differences between their personalities and yours.

Each time I hear or read this gospel account, I find myself feeling sorry for Martha. I suppose most of us more readily identify with the overburdened Martha,

who was constantly doing things to be of service to her guests, than with the pensive Mary, who joined the guests as they sat at the feet of Jesus to listen to his teachings. Mary didn't seem to give a thought as to how the dinner would get on the table. I'm sure, at one time or another, we have all caught ourselves echoing Martha's sharp and cutting remarks to Jesus when we felt deserted by the Marys in our lives: "Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself? Tell her to help me."

It is unfortunate that throughout the centuries, Martha has mainly been viewed as a worrywart whose behavior was interpreted as unacceptable by Jesus and therefore unworthy of imitation. If we are to understand the full implications of the story in Luke, we need to place the scene in its proper context. The story will then be able to draw our attention to some fundamental values that are essential for anyone who chooses to companion Jesus on the journey of faith.

FRIENDSHIP IS DEMONSTRATED

First and foremost, the story is one of friendship. By all indications, the visit it describes was not the first made by Jesus to the home of Martha and Mary. Most likely, Jesus and his disciples had converged on that home many times and had always felt welcome. This day was no exception; obviously, Jesus was comfortable and felt that he was among friends. As in the company of Peter, James, and John, Jesus knew he could be himself and speak his truth without fear of ridicule and rejection. Jesus trusted Martha, Mary, and their brother, Lazarus, with his very soul. It was because of this intimate bond that Jesus was able to say, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried

about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, and it will not be taken from her.”

Getting Martha’s ear was no easy feat. She was not in the mood to listen to anyone, not even Jesus. She had a meal to serve, and she wanted Jesus to make Mary help her.

If you have any knowledge of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, you can appreciate what Jesus was up against. Judging from the story’s evidence, Martha’s personality type was ESTJ (Extraverted, Sensing, Thinking, Judging). Even those of you who are not ESTJs have some of Martha’s characteristics.

ESTJs are excellent workers. Extremely responsible, they approach every task with an eye for thoroughness and exactness. Loyal and trustworthy, they demonstrate their love and respect for others through loving service. They are known for their honesty, fairness, and promptness.

This was the Martha whom Jesus loved so much. Jesus was well aware of the fact that Martha had put her whole self into the preparations for the dinner party. He also knew that Martha was thrilled that Jesus chose her house for such gatherings. It gave her great pleasure to demonstrate her deep love for Jesus by doing for him what she did best: preparing and serving a spectacular feast.

Martha was fully aware that her efforts would not go unnoticed by Jesus. That was why she was able to go to him with her complaint and why she was confident Jesus would tell Mary to help her in serving the meal. Martha was not prepared for Jesus’ answer: “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. . . . Mary has chosen the better part.”

The better part—those three words must have come as such a shock that they probably echoed in Martha’s ear. In fact, the impact of those words probably stopped Martha dead in her tracks. Feelings of hurt, disappointment, resentment, anger, and frustration must have welled up inside her and registered on her face. Jesus’ words of reprimand must have thrown the otherwise confident Martha into a tailspin. She had spent the whole day in the kitchen while Mary had sat listening to Jesus, and now he was saying that Martha was in the wrong. How could this be? I’m sure Martha demanded that Jesus explain himself.

This is how I imagine the scene: Jesus had Martha sit down across the kitchen table from him so that they were face-to-face. After a long, loving glance, Jesus told Martha how much he loved her and that he longed to deepen their relationship. He informed her that this would not be possible if she was never to be in the same room with him. Jesus was not asking Martha to change in any drastic way, although Martha probably thought so; rather, he was asking her to try

to balance the time she spent performing her domestic activities with some quality time spent sharing with Jesus and her other friends.

Jesus made it clear that he did not favor Mary over Martha. He was merely suggesting that she try to assume Mary’s stance during some of the many hours of his visit. Jesus wanted to convey to her that what begins as the listening posture of disciples at the feet of their teacher eventually grows into intimate face-to-face and heart-to-heart faith sharing among close friends.

Jesus did not see Martha and Mary through the eyes of a typical Palestinian male. By inviting them to “sit at his feet,” Jesus was consciously raising both Martha and Mary from the traditional role of woman and servant to the respected role of disciple and friend. Martha finally understood the meaning of Jesus’ words: “There is need of only one thing.”

FAITH SHARING SOUGHT

What was this one needed thing? I truly believe it was being in relationship—the kind of faith-sharing relationship that involves mutual listening and mutual sharing. I believe that Jesus went to that home because he wanted desperately to share with his friends what was truly the most important thing to him: his relationship with the Father. He wanted to talk about how doing the will of his Father was his food, bringing each one of them into communion with himself so that they could encounter and experience God as well.

Jesus wanted to establish the Kingdom of God right there in Martha’s living room. He wanted Martha to be fully present to him. He wanted to remind her who was standing before her: not only her cherished friend but also the Son of God, the Messiah, the Bread of Life, the Cup of Salvation. He had set a table for her at which she could sit face-to-face and heart-to-heart with her Lord and God. He had prepared a meal for her that would feed her drooping spirit and satisfy her hunger for recognition and acceptance—a meal that would fill her with overflowing love so that she would know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that she was loved for being who she was at that moment, not for providing a lavish dinner for her guests.

Jesus also needed to remind Martha that he too was hungry. He too needed to be nourished by her loving care for him. Not only was his body in need of sustenance; his mind, his heart, and his soul were too. He needed to know that he was known and loved for himself. Jesus was seeking Martha’s undivided attention. In return for it, he would focus his energies on Martha and her needs.

Mutual sharing among friends—that was what Jesus was reminding Martha about that day. Giving and receiving were what he was asking Martha to witness to

in the midst of the many guests. Then, with renewed strength, Martha could return to the kitchen with a lightened heart and begin serving the meal.

STRIVING FOR BALANCE

What about Mary? Did she continue to sit at Jesus' feet, or did she hear Martha's angry outburst, pay heed to her cries for assistance, and make her way to the kitchen? Drawing again on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, I suspect that Mary's personality type was INFP (Introverted, Intuitive, Feeling, Perceiving)—the complete opposite of Martha's. Obviously, Martha and Mary did not see eye-to-eye or seem to understand each other's choice of priorities. These two sisters approached the whole of life differently. Just as we all share some traits with Martha, even those of us who are not INFPs have some of Mary's characteristics.

INFPs are socially reticent and quiet. They often appear calm, harmonious, and shy. They care deeply, even passionately, about people, yet verbal expressions of deep feelings do not come easily for them. INFPs often act out their feelings in a symbolic manner. Their empathy and sympathy for others make them good listeners. They seek wholeness, integrity, and health for themselves and others. INFPs need to feel at home with themselves, others, and their surroundings. Quiet time and space are important to them. Uncomfortable with conflict, they seek mutuality in all their relationships. They are easily caught up in abstract spiritual values and have little concern for the events of the real world.

Can you see why Martha was frustrated with Mary? Mary was so caught up in the discussion that she would not have given Martha a thought unless Martha had made that abrupt appearance. Mary had undoubtedly left Martha in the lurch on many other occasions. I'm sure it was Jesus who reminded Mary about her domestic duties. I'm sure he invited her to balance her beautiful intuitive nature with some down-to-earth responsibilities, just as he had encouraged Martha to do the opposite.

Jesus takes time to visit each one of us. After firmly establishing his great love for each of us, he continuously challenges us to become more whole, more at peace with ourselves, by looking lovingly at the gifted Martha and Mary parts of our personality that we have ignored until now. Jesus gently invites each of us to embrace another side of our true self. He calls us into union with ourselves as well as with him and his Father. If we do not take that first step, union with friends and coworkers in ministry is impossible.

How can we begin to achieve a holistic lifestyle? First, by taking long, loving looks at Jesus; second, by taking time for faith sharing with Jesus, with our inner sisters Martha and Mary, and with our sisters and

brothers in community; and third, by allowing ourselves to appear vulnerable as we each struggle to become more whole and at peace. Can a holistic lifestyle be achieved by any other means? I don't think so.

Now that we have caught a glimpse of who we can become if we are faithful to Jesus' call to wholeness, I'd like to point out that having been nourished at the table Jesus set for them, both Martha and Mary were able, at Jesus' invitation, to become their true selves. Their personal transformations become evident as we reflect on two additional scriptural stories. The first one is John 11:1–44, on the raising of Lazarus. As in the first story, Martha is the main character; it is she who converses with Jesus. Mary is hardly mentioned. The second story is John 12:1–11, on the anointing at Bethany. In that story Mary is in the foreground, and Martha is behind the scenes, preparing the meal.

RAISING OF LAZARUS

As you reread the story of the raising of Lazarus, notice that the anointing at Bethany is mentioned, yet it isn't recorded until John 12:1–11. This alerts us to the fact that John wants us to know that the two stories are tightly connected. You can't read one without referring to the other.

According to John 11:1–44, when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him; Mary sat at home. We are given the impression that Martha was able to have some time alone with Jesus. As she came face-to-face with her dear friend, what did she say to him? "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Because Martha knew that Jesus loved her, Mary, and Lazarus so much, she was convinced that if Jesus had come when Lazarus was ill, he would have healed Lazarus. Martha went on to say: "But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you."

Notice how Martha worded her comments. She did not demand that Jesus explain his absence, as she might have in the past; rather, she chose to acknowledge before everyone that she was aware of Jesus' intimate relationship with the Father and knew that whatever Jesus asked of the Father would be granted him. How did Martha receive this awareness? By assuming the listening posture of Mary; by sitting at the teacher's feet as he faith-shared with her. She knew that Jesus would have healed Lazarus, because he had already healed her.

And what was Jesus' reply to Martha? "Your brother will rise."

Martha was quick to respond, "I know he will rise, in the Resurrection on the last day." Not only does that response indicate that Martha was present and listening when Jesus taught his friends about the

Resurrection on the last day; more significant, it indicates that she was convinced of the Resurrection because she herself had already been raised to wholeness by Jesus. Jesus then introduced Martha to a way of seeing him as she never had before—as the Resurrection and the Life.

Jesus pleaded with Martha: “Believe in me. Whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live; everyone who believes in me will live. Do you believe in me? Then Lazarus will live. Do you believe in me? Then, you, Martha, will not die.”

After Jesus shared this new revelation, Martha responded by bestowing on Jesus a litany of titles: “I have come to believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world.” How did she come to that belief? By having listened intently to the gospel message Jesus had so generously shared with her on many occasions. Having sat at the table Jesus set for her, Martha had already tasted the resurrection in herself. Jesus had already raised Martha up to her full stature. He had untied the bonds that had restrained her for years.

Martha no longer had to live up to someone else’s idea of who she should be (a woman whose place is in the kitchen). She no longer had to live up to her own unreal expectations of herself (I must always be busy, always serving others, never thinking of myself or my own needs). Martha no longer had to reject her own truth. Jesus had loved Martha into loving herself. Therefore, Martha was able to put on a new face—the face of her own resurrection.

Martha went home and whispered into Mary’s ear, “The teacher is here and is asking for you.” When Mary saw Jesus, she fell at his feet and said the exact words Martha had said to him: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Those are the only words Mary spoke in any of the three gospel stories discussed, and they were not even hers. Mary took the Martha stance and gave Jesus this message: Practically speaking, we needed you to be here to save Lazarus from death. Where were you? Why did you stay away for two days?

When Jesus saw Mary weeping, he also wept. Jesus too struggled with the reality that “the one he loved [had] died.” Jesus was deeply touched by the darkness of human death and the grief it caused his friends as well as himself. The overwhelming compassion of the Son of Man was manifested to the crowd that had gathered.

The story goes on: “Jesus, perturbed again, came to the tomb and said: ‘Take away the stone.’” As Martha protested, Jesus responded, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?” It was what Jesus said next that made the greatest impact on Martha and Mary and all who had gathered.

First, they realized that Jesus did not petition the Father to raise Lazarus from the dead, but instead thanked him for having already known what was in his heart. The Father always knew what was in Jesus’ heart. Jesus did not have to voice it out loud in order to be heard and answered. Likewise, Jesus knew the desires of the heart of God—who, as Father, would desire only wholeness and fullness of life for Lazarus. With confidence in this, Jesus calls Lazarus forth. Second, they realized that the raising of Lazarus was evidence that Jesus possessed the very power and life of God.

The lesson for them—and for us—is that we can all possess the power and the life of God, not only on the last day but also today. Through this act, they—and we—come to know that Jesus is in eternal communion with God and offers us a share in this relationship with the Father in the present moment. In the home of Martha and Mary, as the Gospel of Luke shows, Jesus simply taught the two women that the experience of being one with the Father is possible. Now, with the raising of Lazarus, he invites them to share in that experience personally, as he has.

ANOINTING AT BETHANY

The experience of being one with the Father—of sharing in the very power and life of God, evidenced in the hope of Resurrection promised by Jesus—is illustrated again in the story of the anointing at Bethany, this time through the person of Mary. Just as the Father and Jesus know the desires of one another’s heart because of their communion in love, so Mary knows the desires of the heart of Jesus, as he has always known hers. Even as they face his impending death together, both need to be reminded of the Resurrection in the here and now—the power and life of God, which her outpouring of love and his response to it can offer to both of them.

Therefore, John begins this story by immediately linking it to that of the raising of Lazarus: “Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.” We are thus alerted to the fact that this too is a resurrection story, even though Jesus speaks only of his death and burial, because the love that calls us to wholeness and new life is poured out in a lavish and extravagant gesture. Even Lazarus’s presence at the table and Martha’s preparing the meal in the background are strong reminders of this: Jesus will conquer his own impending death and be raised to new life.

John is the only gospel writer who identifies by name the woman who anoints Jesus—Mary of Bethany. Like Luke, he also places the scene in the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, where once again Jesus and his disciples gather for dinner. The focus of John’s story is on Mary’s encounter with Jesus.

In Jesus' time it was customary for the guests at a banquet to be greeted in the home with a kiss from the host, to have water brought to them so that they could wash their feet, to have their heads anointed with oil as a gesture of respect, and to recline at the table. Mary followed these common rituals and elevated them to a much higher level. As Martha prepared a sumptuous meal, Mary lavishly poured out her overflowing love for Jesus—her Lord, her teacher, and her friend—not in words of endearment but in an act symbolic of an extravagant love that could not be contained: anointing Jesus with expensive perfumed oil, the fragrance of which “fill[ed] the whole house.” Without counting material or emotional cost, she once again assumed her posture at the feet of Jesus—this time not just as a listener drinking in all Jesus' teachings but also as a full participant in the sacred mystery of death becoming life, of fragmentation becoming wholeness.

The concreteness of Mary's lavish gesture clearly shows her own growth in wholeness. Only Martha could have taught her the importance of attending to such details of hospitality. Only Martha could have helped Mary to express in a sensible way the deep feelings she could never articulate in words. Only Martha could have taught her how to release the power of her symbol. Only the intuitive Mary and the sensate Martha together could have created such a lavish gesture of love.

To the fragmented Judas, who had long before stopped listening, following, and believing, Jesus said of Mary, “Leave her alone.” Jesus was well aware that Mary knew what she was doing—and that in preparing Jesus for burial, she was also preparing him for resurrection.

TOWARD A HOLISTIC SPIRITUALITY

What do the sisters Mary and Martha say to us today about feeling harried and overburdened, about struggling for balance and integration, about striving to live holistic and healthy lives? I will share with you some preliminary answers drawn from my own reflections on what we need to do in order to live a more holistic spirituality.

First, Martha and Mary have taught me that we need to make a home for Jesus in the home within each of us—a place in which we can have an opportunity to be alone with him, listening in solitude; where we can share with him, and have him share with us, the joys and sorrows of each day; where we can once again affirm our invitation to ministry, bringing those for whom and with whom we serve into communion with the Father and the Son; and where we can receive encouragement from one another as we freely voice the struggles we encounter as we strive to be faithful to God's call to wholeness.

Second, Martha and Mary have taught me that every action we perform can be sacred, a living prayer, if we allow the Spirit of Jesus to flow through every action with the transforming power and life of God. Ministry, then—“doing the work of the Father”—becomes much more than taking care of people's physical or spiritual needs. We are called to minister to the whole person: body, mind, heart, and soul. We do this best after we have first ministered wholly to ourselves.

Third, Martha and Mary have taught me much about bringing more balance into my life. Each one of us needs to spend some reflection time with our daily schedule or calendar in front of our eyes, so that we know where the bulk of our time is spent and what does not get done because we “have no time.” We need to make time in our calendars for leisure—for “wasting” time and energy on ourselves and on others—for holy leisure is at the heart of prayer, sharing, being vulnerable, and being in communion with one another.

Fourth, Martha and Mary have taught me to trust my own personal experiences with Jesus and to trust the fact that Jesus has already revealed to me the areas in which I am being called to sister myself—that is, to be free enough to be either Martha or Mary, depending on what the ministry calls me to at any given moment. It is this freedom to be who I need to be that is my resurrection to new life.

These are some of my own preliminary answers; they may or may not match yours. However, I hope it is obvious that tables such as the one in the home of Martha and Mary can be set anywhere we experience union with God and with ourselves in wholeness, and with one another in love: at the feet of our friends and brothers and sisters, during moments of profound sorrow and joy, and at dinner parties where all of us can be served well.

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A Struggle To Regain Mental Health

Ave Clark, O.P., M.A.

The weather reporters on every station were telling people to prepare for a winter storm. Their warnings, if heeded, would lessen the inconvenience of ice and ten or more inches of snow. With a snow shovel, rock salt, and lots of hot chocolate, one could dig out the car and clear a safe path for pedestrians braving the harsh, cold weather.

It struck me as I looked up at the sky from my window that the forecasters' predictions, like the dark clouds, were filled with foreboding. A snowstorm was to be our uninvited visitor. I wished the snow to remain in the clouds. Oh, the longing to remove, ignore, deny, or perhaps even wrestle with something we do not want to endure. Soon, along with my neighbors, I was outdoors in my boots and heavy gloves, shoveling, resting, and slowly contending with the heavy blanket of snow.

I use the analogy of a storm, with the attendant warnings and predictions and ways to survive the encounter, to introduce the effects that the storm of mental illness has had on my own psyche, ego, relationships, work, health, and faith life.

Sometimes a mental illness (e.g., depression or schizophrenia) comes on gradually, and at other times its dark storm clouds rush in. Digging oneself out of such a storm of depression, darkness, sadness, and even thoughts of suicide is not easy. One can

never do it alone. And yet, very often the disease isolates us. It causes a dis-ease with our very life and with family, friends, and coworkers. They watch it sap us of our inner resiliency and self-confidence. They suggest (meaning well) that we try not to focus on the pain, which is invisible to them but so much a part of us. Just to get out of bed, get dressed, look okay, and perform our ministry (which we love) requires unbelievable energy and a flicker of hope.

SHADOW OF SUFFERING

I ask myself why everything has become so difficult. What is this dark storm doing to me? Like a layer of heavy snow—so cold, so icy—it is pushing me down, deeper and deeper, into feelings of isolation, fear, and terrible gloom. I do not want this to be my life, my journey. This agonizing storm will not so easily be blown out to sea. In fact, it has engulfed me in tidal waves of fear. What will steer me on this voyage are gifts of compassion, love, and courage. But first I must discover them by going deeper into this journey through the dark night of my soul.

Will sunshine's light ever melt the snow mounds of grief, loss, anxiety, panic? I so desperately want to flee to somewhere, but nowhere is safe. Every step I take is so heavy. A weary pilgrim, I am searching, strug-

gling, crawling, and trying to shovel a path out of this bitter darkness. I am daring to reclaim life, to find some light in the darkness and grow in my acceptance of an unbelievable diagnosis: I have a mental illness.

How did this happen to someone they say is "too nice to be depressed" and has "so much to give"? Who knows what led to this condition? Perhaps I was forced to endure and accept biological, psychological, and familial upheavals at too young an age. Now a malady lurks within me, waiting to erupt—a cold, blustering storm swirling out of control.

FINDING GOD'S GRACE IN ILLNESS

There is a Chinese saying that makes a lot of sense: "Before you can conquer a beast, you first must make it beautiful." How, I once thought, could I ever describe any part of severe depression as beautiful? What is beautiful is that I am not afraid to touch another's pain with my heart, to feel his or her sadness with my spirit, and to say, "I'll walk with you. I care." Over my years of suffering I have somehow learned to step outside myself, sharing despite my pain. What is beautiful is to believe that at the crossroads of life, we will meet others who will walk with us. With the grace of a loving God, I have been enabled to change hurtful insights and experiences into helpful outreach to others—"sorrowful yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, yet possessing everything" (2 Cor. 6:10). This is surely a miracle of grace.

We can't fix, mend, or change one another. That's up to each pilgrim on the journey. Each of us must shovel ourselves out of the deepest, darkest storms, especially those that hit so hard at holidays, anniversaries, and other occasions for celebration.

Surviving such turmoil is not accomplished overnight. It is done one day at a time and over a long period of time—perhaps even a lifetime. It takes tremendous courage to own one's mental illness and not see it as a negative, to somehow find the sacred in what makes so little sense—a disease that destroys careers, upsets family life, shatters once-treasured friendships. A spirit is dismantled and a life disrupted. Being poor in spirit is one thing, but being crippled in spirit is too painful to imagine. Many of us afflicted by mental illness just want to escape, to hide the pain, to pull the covers over our heads and let the dark day slip by. Lifting a pen to write about the experience seems almost impossible.

DEALING WITH DEVASTATION

How, then, am I writing this article, and why? People need to know that severe mental illness is a terri-

ble disease. No one would ever choose to be depressed. Usually biological in origin, such an illness is psychologically devastating. It can lead to shame, guilt, hurt, humiliation, anger, fear, and sometimes even suicide.

Oh God, one wonders, where is this disease going to lead me? Will my journey include hospitalizations, emergency-room visits filled with terror, medications and their unwelcome side-effects? Am I chained to a lifetime of despair and agony—night terrors, day terrors, fright beyond definition? We are pilgrims wending our way along a dark terrain, searching for the light of healing love.

What I have discovered, fought, and finally been able to accept is that I have a mental illness. It is only part of who I am. Am I afraid to see my fragile ego attempt to contend with another dark day? Will my hypersensitive nature undo some of the courageous steps I've taken not only to survive but also to live life? This illness can mock our self-confidence and break us down if we don't take caring steps to ensure our health. My decision to faithfully and lovingly embrace my illness has set me on my clay feet and enabled me to rely on a Power far greater than myself to help me draw on my gifts, talents, and inner strength.

To come to terms with a mental illness, one must get in touch with what really matters in life. One must find the sacred in the ordinary and in the extraordinary journey of reclaiming wellness to some degree.

HEALING COMPANIONS INVALUABLE

I remember the wintry days that took me to a hospital for eighteen months. I remember later returning to ministry, community, and life, only to discover a dark shadow I had to embrace. There seemed to be no exit from my nightmare. I tried so hard to make sense out of the anxiety, pain, and terror. To get well, I had to accept that I have a chronic mental illness.

Robert Louis Stevenson wrote that "it is the history of our kindnesses that alone makes the world a tender place." I started to see in my wonderful companions—professionals, friends, community and family members who understood—some light. One particular professional, a psychiatrist, gave me much respect and support. He resurrected me time and time again, not with extraordinary skills but with a belief in the human spirit. To that physician I owe my life and my ability to write about my hospitalization without shame, guilt, or fear. He met me at a terrible time in my life and helped me understand and embrace the losses I experienced because of my illness. It is not an illness that lends itself to empathy, but this doctor had plenty of empathy to share. What

helped to heal me was not just his clinical expertise but also his extraordinary kindness.

Along with professional assistance came medication. I so often held in my hand a tiny pill that I wanted to throw away, far away, into the sea. And then I would pray, "Let my weakness, Lord, be my strength; 'for when I am weak, then am I strong'" (2 Cor. 12:10). Humility comes at a cost, for sure, but it can contribute to integrity, growth, and self-acceptance. I encourage anyone with a depressive disorder to get professional assistance, and if medication is part of the course for the journey, dig deep into the snowbank of your sadness and have the courage to take it. Medication can be an essential part of the healing journey to wellness.

The people of my wonderful Dominican community sat down and listened to me and my doctor, and they also sought to be educated concerning depressive disorders. My wonderful friends lightened my burden by truly caring about me and accepting that my illness was just another aspect of me.

As John Ruusbroec has written, "Compassion is a wounding of the heart which love extends to all without distinction." I am thankful to my companions for the concern and understanding, the phone calls and notes, the just being there, often wiping a tear or shedding one with me. Their gentle humor and sustaining love enabled me to remain steadfast. Being treated as lepers, as worthless human beings, has for too long been the fate of people with severe psychiatric disorders. Love calls forth life; rejection diminishes it.

Patience and gentleness with yourself and others, coupled with a faith life, will enable the person with a mental illness to dare to embrace the journey, to put the clay vessel in the heart of a loving God, and to slowly and gently heal.

FAITH UNDER SIEGE

We come to the crossroads at which suffering meets faith. We steer a painful, winding course through waves of havoc, toward Love's light, knowing that we are in God's eyes a gift of love incarnate.

We are all defined by the human condition—frail and filled with illusions about what is important and worldly. We kneel, bow our heads, clasp our hands in prayer, and surrender with a love that cares deeply and greatly, for we have discovered that beyond the dark shadows of our imprisonment of sadness is a glimmer of life—reborn, renewed, and reclaimed.

The shadow of suffering crosses the life of every one of us. To some it is a meaningless darkness. To those who look upon the cross and the Crucified, it is hope and love. Faith under siege can be hope. Hope in a resurrection of life. The miracle is not to wish the snow back up into the sky but to somehow find some beauty, some mystery, in the digging out.

Will I be cured? Will my mental illness go away? I wish it would, especially on the hard and lonely days. But I've found hope by clinging to my faith, and so my journey on the winding road of mental illness continues. The journey has taken me into others' broken hearts and aching spirits. It has taken me to a quiet chapel where I look around and understand my valiant companions praying, "Lord, help me to believe."

I hope my sharing this story will touch a heart and spirit that feel the pain of loneliness and fear. Perhaps it will enable someone to be better understood and someone else to be a helpful friend, a compassionate presence. Healing brings with it the gifts of mercy, joy, and gratitude. We are clay vessels, not gold, but we are filled with love, a gift of life to celebrate.



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A New Look at Lay Ministry

An Interview with Brother Loughlan Sofield, S.T., M.A.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT: Brother Sofield, can you tell us about the research project you recently concluded—the one in which you interviewed several dozen Catholics you designated as “wisdom people”?

Loughlan Sofield: Gladly. What we did was interview a carefully selected group of women and men whose workplace lives have been viewed by others as manifesting outstanding leadership qualities and profoundly Christian values. Our assumption was that such people must have acquired a large store of wisdom that could be discovered and then shared with leaders in the church. Specifically, we wanted to tap their wisdom and explore their insights regarding current church leadership.

HD: Who joined you in conducting this research?

LS: Don Kuhn, who was formerly director of employee development for AT&T and is now involved in education for executives.

HD: Would you tell us a little more about these “wisdom people” and why you identified them in that way?

LS: We gradually came to call them that when we recognized how commonly they speak with a wisdom flowing from a deep, personal relationship with God that is combined with experience, integrity, and faithfulness. We believed we could detect in their insights the wisdom of the Holy Spirit being communicated through them.

HD: How did you select the individuals you interviewed?

LS: First we searched out a few people who fulfilled our principal criterion: they were transparently displaying Christian values to others in the workplace. This pilot group gave us a chance to develop our interview approach. We then selected our interviewees by asking people around the country to nominate qualified persons, by choosing some ourselves on the basis of stories in newspapers or magazines, and by getting recommendations from people who had heard about our project and identified suitable candidates for us. In all, we received more than a hundred nominations, and from those we chose forty-two people to interview in depth.

HD: Were all whom you interviewed laypersons? Or were members of the clergy and religious congregations among them?

LS: All the interviewees were laity—not because we don’t think the others reveal wisdom, but because we believe that many leaders within the church fail to pay attention to what can be learned by listening to laypersons who are involved in ministry.

HD: What sort of work are the interviewees doing?

LS: The whole gamut—the group included corporate chief executive officers, hairdressers, day laborers, columnists, nutrition coaches, nurses, doctors,

and lawyers, ranging in age from early thirties to mid-seventies.

HD: What did you ask them?

LS: We invited them to tell us the ways church leaders would have to change in order to improve their effectiveness in spreading the gospel. We wanted to hear what they would recommend if they could speak directly to the people in leadership roles.

We also wanted to find out as much as possible about these individuals. We inquired about the values that influence their everyday work life, the sources of their values, what stresses they experience in living those values, and whether they regard what they do in the workplace as a ministry.

HD: You've referred to "church leaders" several times. Whom do you include in that category?

LS: Anyone who is in a position of influence within the church. That would include, for example, educators, clergy, bishops, pastoral council members, and women and men who belong to religious congregations.

HD: And what did you discover about the values of the "wisdom people" you studied?

LS: One thing we found fascinating was that ten in a row told us that they had to "do the right thing," regardless of the consequences. A teacher was fired because she had confronted her department chairperson about something she considered unfair and unethical. When asked whether she would have taken the same course of action if she had known she would lose her job, she immediately answered, "Of course! Otherwise I couldn't live with myself."

HD: What were some other values they identified?

LS: These people are truly generative—sincerely concerned about making the world a better place for others to live in. But the word they used most frequently to describe themselves is *compassionate*.

Our interviewees repeatedly told us that they would want all church leaders to strive to become, and to lead others in the church to be, compassionate and generative people with uncompromising integrity.

HD: How did they become that way themselves?

LS: They reported that their family of origin was the principal transmitter of their values. Surprisingly, most of the women and the men in our study identified their fathers as the primary source of values within the family.

Other influences on their values came from mentors (especially business associates) and parental

figures, such as scout leaders and athletic coaches.

Some couldn't point out specific individuals as influential in the development of their value system, but they were able to recall life experiences they had deeply reflected upon, such as a personal or family trauma, which had taught them what to regard as important in life.

HD: Had the church played a major role in influencing their values?

LS: We had expected that to be the case, but few of the interviewees said the church had contributed in that way. Those who did say the church had shaped their values were people living in a region of the country where Catholics are a definite minority, or else they were converts to Catholicism.

HD: Where do the interviewees get the support to live by their values?

LS: Most of it comes from the family, along with friends and peers. One constant finding is that men credit their wives with being their major source of support. In fact, many sounded as though they were presenting a case for canonization when they described their wives. But the same was not true for the women. They did not speak nearly as passionately about the moral support they receive from their husbands.

HD: You said earlier that you wanted to find out whether your interviewees regard what they are doing in the workplace as their ministry. Do they?

LS: They certainly do. They told us they view their work as their vocation and their mission, as well as their ministry.

One financial officer in a large urban hospital described her work as her "walk with God." Many others said they see themselves as recipients of talents that are God-given, and they believe that they have a responsibility to use those gifts in a generative way.

HD: Did you define the term *ministry* for them?

LS: No. We just asked them if they consider what they do at work each day to be their ministry.

A hairdresser replied that she was not accustomed to identifying her work as ministry. We informed her that the two people who had nominated her for our study told us that they feel "ministered to" when she does their hair. After a pause for reflection, she responded, "All I've ever wanted to do was be a mother and a hairdresser, so that must be my ministry."

HD: Do you yourself regard everyone's work as his or her ministry?

LS: For me, an activity has to include a number of elements to merit being called ministry. It has to flow from one's relationship with God. That is, it has to express one's spirituality, it has to involve a conscious use of one's God-given gifts to help extend God's Kingdom, and it must be perceived (at least vaguely) as something God is asking one to do.

The wisdom people want to challenge church leaders to expand their understanding of what constitutes ministry and, as a result, to give more recognition and support to those who feel called to minister in the world rather than in the parish or through church-related activities.

I would add that the institutional church generally fails to affirm, confirm, and support the people whose primary ministry is in the workplace.

HD: What else did the wisdom people teach you?

LS: That they would agree with Father Avery Dulles in his recent observation that the church is becoming too "ecclesiocentric"—in other words, that

church leadership is focusing primarily on itself and its own internal problems.

They encouraged all church leaders to spend a greater amount of time listening. Very few of those we interviewed had ever been asked to share their wisdom. They also want to help improve the preaching of the gospel and the development of truly Christian communities.

HD: How can we learn more about the results of your research?

LS: Don Kuhn and I have written about the study in the book *The Collaborative Leader: Listening to the Wisdom of God's People* (Ave Maria Press). You might also want to listen to a tape titled *Working Christians: Bringing Meaning to the Workplace* (distributed by Saint Anthony Messenger Press).

HD: Thank you for describing the fruits of your research. Our readers will surely find ways to use the knowledge you have shared with us.

Humor Helps Enhance Health

Laughter is capable of producing the medical results that many expensive drugs are prescribed to achieve—but without the risk of negative side effects. Laughing, researchers have found, can reduce blood pressure, induce a sense of euphoria, and increase muscle flexion. It also can have profound effects on the body's immune system, enabling it to destroy invading bacteria, viruses, and even cancer cells.

These were among the findings discussed by physicians, psychotherapists, and other health care specialists attending the recent sixth annual meeting of the American Association for Therapeutic Humor. Assembled in Orlando, Florida, these professional healers heard Dr. Stanley Tan of Loma Linda (California) University explain that "natural killer cells that destroy viruses and tumors increase during

a state of mirth. Gamma-interferon, a disease-fighting protein, rises with laughter, as do B-cells, which produce disease-destroying antibodies, and T-cells, which orchestrate the immune response."

Laughter also has beneficial effects on the nervous and endocrine systems. Health columnist Delthia Ricks, writing for Knight-Ridder News, says that it provides "a safety valve that shuts off the flow of stress hormones, the fight or flight compounds that come into play during times of stress, hostility and rage." As a consequence, people who laugh a lot are less likely to experience heart attacks than are their humorless neighbors.

Children, on average, laugh about 400 times a day; adults, only 15 times. Parents and educators, please take notice!

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